JOURNEY FROM THE STATEHOUSE TO THE SCHOOLHOUSE: A STUDY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE POLICY

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by Kimberly A. Thuente
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An abstract of a Dissertation by
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The problem. The problem of this study was to identify and analyze factors that assist in the creation of meaning at the local level of state school improvement mandates and determine what assisted in implementation at the classroom level.

Procedures. Qualitative methodology was chosen because of the naturalistic and contextual perspective it provides. Twenty-eight teachers and administrators were selected from two nominated districts and asked three research questions. Case study methodology was chosen as the research design because it provides a picture of what is happening and can capture the individual differences from one site to the next.

Findings. While the efforts of the two school districts to implement the school improvement mandates were different, six common themes emerged from the interviews with administrators and teachers and the classroom observations. The common themes included: (1) district culture and structures, (2) characteristics of information provided and received, (3) support provided to staff and the broad-based involvement of staff, (4) the impact at the classroom level, (5) the multiple dimensions of time, and (6) suggestions for legislators/policy makers.

Conclusions. Five conclusions were drawn from this study: (1) Leading school reform is everybody's business. (2) Good policy design is worth the effort. (3) Useful policy design reflects the complexity of implementation reality. (4) Time matters. (5) Rewriting the rules is not cool!

Recommendations.

1. Bring educators into the process when decisions about design, funding, and implementation strategies are being discussed because these are the issues that most concern them.
2. Consider the processes, strategies, and timelines needed for successful implementation because effective change does not occur overnight nor in an atmosphere of frequent modification of the rules.
3. Link mandates to existing work in the district and previous improvement efforts to reduce fragmentation and overload.
4. Establish and support structures in the district to encourage professional learning, risk-taking, and open communication.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1998, Iowa joined the ranks of other states hoping to increase the level of student achievement in schools by passing a comprehensive school improvement and accountability mandate known as House File 2272 (1998), the *Accountability for Student Learning Act*. This mandate required the Iowa State Board of Education to adopt rules related to the incorporation of accountability for student achievement into the education standards and accreditation process. With the revision of Iowa Administrative Code, Chapter 12, school districts in Iowa would be responsible for creating, implementing, and submitting to the state a comprehensive school improvement plan every five years. School districts would also be required to submit an annual progress report to the Iowa Department of Education and to their local community.

Additional requirements were added to the Iowa Administrative Code, Chapter 12 in 1999 with the passage of House File 743 (1999), *Class Size/Early Intervention Program Act*. With this mandate, school districts would need to include plans to move to or maintain instructional class size of 17 students in grade kindergarten through third. In addition, students' progress in identified skill

areas would need to be assessed utilizing diagnostic assessments and communicated to parents at least twice each year.

Context of the Study

While there are required components within the Iowa school improvement mandates, the process used to implement them is a local decision with no real step-by-step formula defined by either the legislature or the Iowa Department of Education. Instead, districts are encouraged to engage educators and others in their communities in an ongoing, dynamic process aimed at advancing student learning (Iowa Department of Education, 1999). Some manner of accountability is in place in the Iowa Administrative Code, Chapter 12 through requirements of the annual progress report and a school accreditation visit scheduled every five years. However, the influence of local control in determining which component(s) will be addressed when and with how much emphasis creates a variety of responses to the mandate across the state.

A state mandate on its own will not create a change in student performance and achievement. Rather, as Sarason (cited in Fullan, 1991, p. 117) states, "Educational change depends on what teachers do and think—it's as simple and complex as that. It would all be so easy if we could legislate changes

in thinking." How teachers and administrators make meaning of policy and mandates and how they put that meaning into practice by trying out their ideas is what is at the center of implementation. They arrive at understanding when they construct their own knowledge and devise their own cognitive maps of the interconnections among the concepts being considered and the facts (Peters & March, 1999; Shepard, 1995). Understanding then allows them to take applications to the classroom level to increase student achievement.

Problem of the Study

The problem of this study was to explore central office and elementary educators' interpretations of state school improvement mandates as they are internally negotiated at the local level, the relationships of their interpretations to the mandated components of the comprehensive school improvement plan, and the actual application of the components to increase student achievement. In this study, I examined and analyzed what occurs in a district that allows it to make the mandates work. Specifically, what factors assist in making meaning of the school improvement mandates and what helps to implement the mandates at the classroom level?

School districts across Iowa are in the midst of implementing a variety of plans to increase student achievement for all students. These efforts are echoed across the nation as educators, communities, legislators, and policy-makers keep school improvement and increased accountability on the forefront of policy agendas (Hansen, 1991; Adams, Jr. & Kirst, 1999; Iowa Department of Education, 1997). Although the other 49 states have school improvement and accountability mandates that focus on state performance standards and state tests, Iowa has formulated its school improvement mandates to emphasize local flexibility and control.

Research Questions

The research questions that will guide this study are as follows:

1. What is the history and intent of the Iowa comprehensive school improvement mandates?
2. How do the state school improvement mandates translate into district/building policy and classroom practice?
    a. What knowledge base and reasoning skills assist the development of meaning of state school improvement mandates?
    b. What external/internal factors impact the implementation of the state school improvement mandates?

3. What recommendations can be made to policymakers and administrators regarding the effective implementation of state school improvement mandates?

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study will provide involved districts with a description of current implementation of the components of the state school improvement mandates and assist other districts in planning for possible implementation actions in their districts. The study also provides suggestions for the Iowa Department of Education and the fifteen area education agencies, located throughout the state, in planning for the creation of networks, support structures, and possible service and/or leadership activities to assist districts in implementing the school improvement mandates. Finally, the study provides guidance for future design of state mandates directed towards local school districts.

This study concentrated on investigating and telling the story of implementation of Iowa school improvement mandates from the elementary level perspective. It will be of interest to other educational agencies at local and state level who are looking for examples of structures, processes, and practices to engage their teachers and communities in local school improvement efforts. In addition, this study

will be of interest to policy-makers who need to know the impact of putting pen to paper in drafting a state policy ,and more importantly, what happens once it reaches educators at the local level who have the responsibility to create a system that effectively moves the mandate from idea to action.

Definition of Terms

The terms listed below are defined to provide clarity for the reader of this study:

Active Use is defined by Fuhrman, Clune, and Elmore (1988) as "acting in advance" of the mandate or "responding in a manner that exceeds the minimum."

AEA is the abbreviation for Area Education Agency. There are fifteen intermediary agencies in Iowa designed to provide school improvement assistance as well as educational, media, and special education services to local school districts (Iowa Department of Education, 1999).

Annual Progress Report (APR) is a written summary of the student learning and district accomplishments achieved in the previous school year. This is a report required by and defined in House File 2272 (Iowa Department of Education, 1999).

Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) is a five-year plan prepared by each school district in Iowa to describe how it will increase the learning achievement and performance of all students. The plan is required by and defined in House File 2272 (Iowa Department of Education, 1999).

Ed-Flex is a process outlined in the mid-1990's reauthorization of ESEA which allows states to waive some federal requirements for programs in order to increase student achievement through state and local initiatives (Adams, Jr. & Kirst, 1999).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is the federal accountability mandate that requires states to set challenging standards for students (Adams, Jr. & Kirst, 1999).

House File 743 is the *Class Size/Early Intervention Program Act* that requires school districts to include in their Comprehensive School Improvement Plan plans to move to or maintain instructional class size of seventeen students in grades kindergarten through third and develop procedures for assessing and reporting to parents student progress in reading and math (House File 743, 1999).

House File 2272 (H.F. 2272) is the Iowa comprehensive school improvement and accountability mandate known as the *Accountability for Student Learning Act.* (House File 2272, 1998).

Iowa Model is a written plan that defines how Iowa will meet the intent of the federal regulations of ESEA and at the same time recognize the local control of Iowa schools (Jeffery, personal communication, 1998).

FINE Foundation

The support of the First In The Nation In Education (FINE) Educational Research Foundation in carrying out this research is gratefully acknowledged. This research, in conjunction with three forthcoming dissertations, provided a broad-based opportunity for insights into the school improvement policy implementation process in Iowa schools. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of this foundation and no official endorsement should be inferred.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The interest in educational reform is not new. Waves of reform have occurred over the last century, originating at the federal, state, and local level. Although suggested methods have varied, the focus has remained constant—improving student performance (Firestone & Corbett, 1988).

The National Perspective

The launch of the Sputnik rocket in the mid-1950s created a public awareness of the need for school accountability. The first large-scale effort, Project TALENT, focused on analyzing the performance of students on uniform objective and traditional tests against variables such as class size, expenditures, student socioeconomic backgrounds, and teacher qualifications (Hansen, 1991).

Mandated accountability in federal programs began in the late sixties when President Johnson's "War on Poverty" included mandated evaluation for federally funded programs as a contingency of continued funding. Hansen (1991) states that the 1966 Coleman Report (The Commission of Equal Educational Opportunity) concluded that input variables (e.g., class size, expenditures, student socioeconomic backgrounds, teacher qualifications, etc.) were not

reliable indicators of school effectiveness. Thus, a new era of accountability was about to begin with the application of systems models and technical accounting methods in the seventies.

The first nationwide testing began in 1970 with the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test. It had a profound influence on educational accountability by reporting student performance through popular media, capturing public attention and focusing it on the alleged failures of schools to adequately prepare students for the world they face upon graduation. In addition, many of the states began establishing minimum competency standards and entered the arena of statewide assessment programs.

In addition to the increase of testing and assessment, accountability in the 1970s also seemed to focus on enhancing the efficiency of schools, not the quality of education as indicated by student outcomes. It focused on budgets, management and fiscal processes, strategic planning, MBOs, etc. (Hansen, 1991).

The 1983 federal report by the National Commission of Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, renewed public cries for school accountability and marked a major shift in public

expectations by focusing on improved educational performance and student achievement through rigorous and measurable standards and performance-based accountability to citizens (Hansen, 1991; Adams, Jr. & Kirst, 1999). This focus was reinforced by the National Governors' Association Committee on Educational Goals that issued the *America 2000* report in 1989. One recommendation in this report called for establishing general educational goals and nation-wide proficiency testing in grades 4, 8, and 12 (Adams, Jr. & Kirst, 1999).

During the 1990s the movement to improve the condition of American education brought about state mandates for standards, benchmarks, and proficiency testing. The reform movement began to embrace the term "restructuring," reflecting current trends in business and industry sectors and the global economy. The focus shifted to site-based management, teacher empowerment, collaborative decision-making, and community involvement (Hansen, 1991; Adams, Jr. & Kirst, 1999).

In 1994, several events continued to shape the reform and accountability movement. The Clinton administration pushed through the passage of *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*. This legislation provided funding opportunities and guidelines for helping all children achieve to challenging standards. Also, the

reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA,)* also known as the *Improving America's Schools Act,* required states to set the same challenging standards for students served by Title I as are applied to other students, to measure student and school progress towards meeting the standards, and to hold school accountable for the results they achieve (Adams, Jr. & Kirst, 1999). This reauthorization also established a process known as Ed-Flex, which allows states to waive some federal requirements for programs in order to increase student achievement through state and local initiatives.

The Iowa Perspective

In Iowa, school accountability efforts were formalized into state administrative code after the *A National At Risk* report was published. Between 1985 and 1987, Iowa Code section 280.12 and section 280.18 were established that required school districts to adopt goals to improve student achievement and performance and to periodically assess progress. Student progress and assessment reports were to be filed with the DE and copies made available to residents of the school district. Districts were also required to conduct periodic needs assessments and create long-range goals and actions plans to meet the needs.

In the early 1990s, student achievement scores, as measured by the *Iowa Test of Basic Skills* and the *Iowa Test of Educational Development*, began to decline. Slippage of academic performance and the need to prepare students to keep pace with a rapidly changing world prompted leaders in the state to begin the process for a new reporting and accountability system (Carney, 1999).

The Iowa Department of Education released the report, *Education is Iowa's Future: The State Plan for Educational Excellence in the 21st Century* in January 1992. The plan, developed by a state-wide, representative task force, included the following goals/objectives for elementary and secondary schools:

- To increase the level of learning and achievement of all students to their maximum potential (student outcomes, student assessment, early childhood education, parent and community involvement, special education);
- To increase the productivity and capacity of human resources in the state's education system;
- To transform the education system at the building, district, area, and state levels to support the teaching and learning process;

- To provide leadership to improve Iowa education through systematic planning and quality assurance.

This report was just the beginning. The Iowa Department of Education continued to work on creating a process for developing a comprehensive state improvement plan and in 1997 a number of efforts came together to shape the future of school accountability in Iowa. The United States Department of Education approved the "Iowa Model," a written plan that met the intent of the federal regulations of ESEA and at the same time recognized the local control of Iowa schools. The "Iowa Model" incorporated the components of Iowa Code Sections 280.12 and 280.18, and Iowa Administrative Code Chapter 12, "General Accreditation Standards." It required schools to establish challenging content standards, multiple measures of assessment, and student performance standards with at least three designated levels of performance (Jeffery, personal communication, 1998). The United States Department of Education also approved Iowa as one of twelve Ed-Flex demonstration states.

That same year, the Iowa Department of Education (1997) released a revised edition of the report, *Education Is Iowa's Future: The State Plan for*

Educational Excellence in the 21st Century. The updated plan included the following goals for elementary and secondary schools:

- To help schools and their communities obtain the training and resources they need to meet the learning needs of all their children and adults including, support for school improvement;
- To coordinate the educational support system so it is focused on helping schools and communities meet their local needs;
- To provide collaborative state-level leadership and support for Iowa education in order to create system-wide improvement and increased student achievement.

In addition to the Iowa Department of Education report, four recommendations were made by the Governor's Commission on Educational Excellence for the 21st Century (Pomerantz, 1997):

- Accountability for student achievement
- Strategies to improve achievement for all students
- School readiness for every child
- Transformation of the education profession for the 21st Century

The various efforts to define school improvement and accountability in Iowa became more formalized in 1998 when the Iowa General Assembly passed House File 2272, *Accountability for Student Learning*, an act requiring the State Board of Education to adopt rules relating to the incorporation of accountability for student achievement into the education standards and accreditation process. Ultimately, this piece of legislation required school districts to begin comprehensive school improvement planning that included at least seven required components: community involvement; data collection, analysis, and goal setting; content standards and benchmarks; action planning to meet needs; evaluation of the comprehensive school improvement plan; assessment of student progress (multiple measures); and annual reporting (Iowa Department of Education, 1999).

Then in 1999, the Iowa General Assembly passed House File 743, *Early Intervention Program/Class Size Reduction*, which provided funds to public schools for class size reduction and improving the basics (reading and math) in grades kindergarten through third. The district expectations, as a result of this mandate, included providing evidence about how each K–3rd grade student performs in three identified skill areas (phonemic awareness, oral reading ability,

comprehension) relative to district standards and benchmarks. Evidence about individual student achievement needs to be shared with parents at least twice each year.

The two new pieces of legislation were combined into a revised version of Chapter 12 of the Administrative Rules in the Iowa Code. The new administrative rules took effect in July 1999 and each public school district and accredited non-public school were provided with a manual, *Technical Assistance for Comprehensive School Improvement*, to begin the comprehensive school improvement planning process. The first comprehensive school improvement plan and annual progress report that incorporated the changes made in Chapter 12 were submitted to the Iowa Department of Education on September 15, 2000.

School Reform Efforts

The reform agenda in the 1980s highlighted improving teaching and learning for all students. The predominant focus of policy approaches was the development and implementation of rigorous standards. As the decade progressed, it became obvious that standards alone could not do the job of educational reform. Standards set minimum expectations, but to inspire excellence, mandates required local capacity for implementation. Another

realization was that one approach was not going to resolve all educational problems. Just as the needs of students varied, so did the needs and capacities of school districts. It became apparent that different kinds of problems were going to require several approaches or combinations of approaches (Firestone, Fuhrman, & Kirst, 1989). One-size mandates were not going to fit all educational situations.

In 1987, the Maine Department of Education created the Maine State Restructuring Program to encourage schools to explore how they might restructure schools to ensure successful learning for ALL students. This grant program recognized that the diverse needs of student and communities might mean different approaches to restructuring so allowed school flexibility within the parameters of the grant application. Ten schools took on the challenge and discovered that there was no single recipe for successful reform. However, they did discover that there were some common ingredients in their experiences (Cox & deFrees, 1991):

- there was a clear and shared understanding regarding the focus of the change;
- changes were organizational and systematic;

- change needed to be managed and maintained; and
- funds were spent to make professional development and release time available.

In addition to the four common themes, the schools also discovered that the continued active engagement of all stakeholders was necessary for successful implementation of the changes.

Cawelti (Educational Research Service,1999) also discovered in his study of six schools involved in school improvement efforts that different approaches and paths were necessary for successful implementation of change efforts. All of the schools focused on student achievement as an end goal but created different educational programs to meet that goal. Other common characteristics Cawelti identified are teamwork as a way of like, strong, educational leadership, and committed staff members.

Other explorations of district use of state reform efforts indicate that major policy decisions on how to respond to mandates are district-wide and are made at the top of the organizational hierarchy with the superintendent serving as prime point of contact and district contextual issues having a shaping influence on interactions and results. District leadership strategies are a critical

linkage in translating legislative mandates into district practice (Oakes, 1989; Firestone, 1989; Wills & Peterson, 1992).

Elmore (2000, pp. 20–21) supports this concept by describing five principles that are foundational for leadership focused on large scale improvement:

1. The purpose of leadership is the improvement of instructional practice and performance, regardless of role.
2. Instructional improvement requires continuous learning.
3. Learning requires modeling.
4. The roles and activities of leadership flow from the expertise required for learning and improvement.
5. The exercise of authority requires reciprocity of accountability and capacity.

These five principles encourage an environment where learning is a focal point for an organization. Leaders lead by modeling the values and behaviors that they expect of all staff and by involving the staff in a variety of opportunities that encourages diversity of ideas, functions, roles, and learning styles. Leadership potential and the capacity to learn are cultivated at all levels and accountability is shared by all.

Studies completed in Oregon by Conley and Goldman (1995), after passage of major reform legislation, indicate there are some differences in reactions based on geography and school size. They also state that the findings,

taken in their entirety, may suggest that some combination of district-level actions and school specific factors affect attitudes. State actions initiated interactions and responses to the mandates that resulted in a wide range of interpretations and actions at the district level. Thus, it seems necessary to begin policy development and implementation from the perspective of making meaning at individual sites instead of as an integrated public school system (Conley & Goldman, 1993).

The 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act is an example of a systemic reform effort that combined top-down state mandates with bottom-up local engagement. A study by Porter investigated how this approach actually played out in a rural Kentucky high school. Porter found that while the policies were written at the state level, the actual reform is a "radically local process" (Porter, 1996, p. 111).

The negotiations about the proposed changes that occurred at the building level were influenced by the local culture, existing relationships and power hierarchies, and the way residents defined the meaning of education for themselves. Defining the problems and possible solutions was a key dimension in creating ownership for the process. Active involvement of all stakeholders also

increased the support for risk-taking in defining solutions and in maintaining a system that matched the culture and lives of the local community.

Porter also identified several key points to be considered by policy-makers and those directing school reforms. The reliance on generic, broadly construed measures of success misses the value and potential of local differences. It is also critical to develop connections between the mandate and those involved in the process to reduce resistance and create a sense of local control. Finally, cultivating patience is necessary to prevent hasty state intervention that might destroy solutions emerging at the local level that are designed to meet the priorities defined at the local level.

The Issue of Time

One of the constant adversaries in any change effort is time. Coverage of classrooms generally remains the norm with opportunities for in-depth inquiry, staff discussion, study groups, and professional development lacking from daily plans and annual calendars (Brown & Moffett, 1999).

For teachers to effectively implement new educational practices associated with school improvement mandates or reforms, they must often learn new skills and acquire new knowledge, attitudes, or values. This process

requires more than just adding days to a calendar. The acquisition of new skills and attitudes is a multi-stage process that involves different activities and issues as teachers proceed through the stages of affective and cognitive development appropriate to the mandate or change efforts (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988).

Elmore and McLaughlin (1988) identify these developmental stages as the survival stage, where teachers learn about the importance of new practices and how to function at a minimal level of competence; the consolidation stage, where teachers begin to integrate new practices and perspectives into traditional roles and routines; and finally, the mastery stage, where rehearsal, feedback, support and conceptual understanding are common.

A similar progression of stages is suggested by Adelman and Walking-Eagle (1997) in their four year study of the use of time for teaching and learning. They identify three time-related issues during three stages of the change process. Time to learn about and practice new behaviors is required at the onset stage of a reform or change effort. The next stage, implementation, requires time to introduce and institutionalize the new strategies fully into daily life in the classroom. In the final stage, teachers need time to reflect on the effort, time to

assess its outcomes, and time to keep moving forward for continuous improvement.

In both descriptions of the stages of change and the relationship time plays, it involves more than simply adding days to a calendar. Because learning is an individual as well as social activity, contextual factors as well as the variability of individual affective responses and learning styles need to be considered when planning for study, reflection, and application. To assist this, opportunities within a district should be coordinated and planned in such a way to reduce competing priorities and facilitate differing developmental rates of learning and understanding (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988).

Another dimension of time that needs to be considered is the time teachers already spend in meetings, committee work, curriculum development, and the preparation and planning needed for daily teaching. These tasks and activities need to continue even as they are learning and practicing new strategies. This dual track teachers live again points out the need for affective and collaborative support structures to be designed within districts (Darling-Hammond, 1995).

The impact time has on successful school change is something that also needs to be considered by policy-makers. Often, the pattern in educational reform policy has been a leap from a planning phase involving policy-makers to an expectation of full-blown implementation with documentation of results within two to three years. What policy-makers need to realize is that the learning needed for successful implementation doesn't happen that way. It is a complex endeavor that needs to consider the individual rates of learning and the differences in abilities to adapt to new skills and attitudes. Policy-makers also need to understand and plan for the reality of an "implementation dip" as things often get worse before learning reaches a transfer to practice stage (Fullan, 1991; Adelman & Walking-Eagle, 1997; Moffett, 2000). Adequate time for preparation, practice, and implementation should not be underestimated.

Policy Mandates

One of the obvious conclusions that runs through the research on policy implementation is that "it is incredibly hard to make something happen, most especially across layers of government and institutions" (McLaughlin, 1987). Policy-makers can't mandate what matters. They set policy, establish standards, and monitor performance but successful policy implementation depends on local

capacity (knowledge, skills, resources) and will (attitudes, motivation, beliefs, commitment to action). Policy initiatives depend on what happens as individuals interpret and act on them (McLaughlin, 1987; Fullan, 1993).

Successful implementation of reform mandates generally require a combination of pressure and support. The application of pressure from the top signals the seriousness of the reform, the legitimacy of the reform, and the priority it should take. On the other hand, targeted support responds to the capacity of the school to use the reform and the individual needs of those involved. Simply put, pressure is required to focus attention on the reform and support is needed to enable implementation (McLaughlin, 1987; Firestone, 1989).

As a result of a study on the reform process and effects in six states, Fuhrman, Clune, and Elmore (1988) report two factors turned out to be more important to successful implementation of reform policy than predicted. First, compliance depended heavily on the extent to which technical knowledge existed and school staff felt competent to make the needed changes. Capacity and comfort level reduced the potential of implementation problems. In addition, the district context proved to be influential. The extent to which reform policies

coincided with already existing local goals, priorities, and capacity influenced the ease and comfort level of implementation. Districts that found close connections did not merely adapt to state policies; but rather, actively engaged in their implementation. These districts, defined as "strategic interactors," seized the opportunity to coordinate and expand state policies to meet their needs and often became actively involved in shaping future state policy.

Connectedness and the development of local capacity are also concepts outlined by Fullan (1999) as critical to an organization's ability to transfer policy into local practice. Because multiple innovations and reform efforts tend to occur simultaneously, organizations need to look for connections and replicate conditions that previously allowed successful implementation. Reducing fragmentation through these connections begins to develop an infrastructure that supports change and encourages coherence.

Legislated school improvement mandates, by their nature, need to be general, uniformly applicable, and enforceable from a distance. Districts have the authority and control to choose to ignore, adapt, adopt, coordinate or expand on the mandate (Goertz, 2001). However, to be effective, they must be implemented

by teachers in classrooms who ultimately must interpret their meaning, adopt their intent, and create action (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985; Porter, 1996).

One of the related lessons detailed by McLauglin in his study of the implementation process is that "change ultimately is a problem of the smallest unit (McLaughlin, 1987, pg. 174). It is individuals, not organizations, that interpret, respond to, and implement change.

Improvement or excellence cannot be coerced or mandated. Instead, it is a condition to which individuals need to aspire, to be encouraged, to be supported, and to be nurtured in their creation of meaning and action (Timar & Kirp, 1987). Kirst, as cited in a publication by Neale, Bailey, & Ross (1981), summarizes school improvement efforts and mandates this way:

> "Educational change...cannot be imposed from the top down or through parent pressure on uncommitted and reluctant teachers. The cutting edge of education is at the school and classroom level. This is where the child comes in contact with the educational process. Consequently, we need to give teachers more ability to plan and evaluate school reforms at the individual school level. Principal, parents and teachers at the school level can best insure implementation of educational ideas."

While policy-makers cannot mandate what matters, they can provide a catalyst and a language for reexamining and discussing current practice and desired results (Goertz, 2001; Fullan, 1993).

Pulling It All Together

Policy-makers at the federal, state, and local level continue to look for successful ways to increase the levels of learning and achievement for all students. Some efforts have been successful and others frustrating and not as successful. What is known is that a contemporary role of policy-makers is to set the standards and mandate the context and procedures for implementation. In this context, the role of the teachers and administrators at the local level is to take action by interpreting the language; connecting the efforts to existing priorities, policies, and initiatives; and creating learning environments that support students, teachers, and administrators in the efforts of school improvement (Fuhrman, et al., 1988; Fullan, 1999; Conley & Goldman, 1995).

School reform in the form of policy and mandate implementation, is a multifaceted phenomenon that demonstrates the tension between state regulation and the need for maintaining local control and flexibility. This is reflective in the journey that occurred in Iowa as the policy-makers attempted to balance federal mandates; state responses to the federal mandates; the desire to see increased accountability and student achievement; and the history of local control in the state.

Finally, implementation is "a process of interaction between the setting of goals and actions geared to achieving them" (Jenkins, 1978, p. 204). The process is dynamic, complex, and as school districts transition from decision to action, it is not smooth, linear, nor obvious. With these concepts in mind, this research study was designed to understand how two school districts in Iowa moved from decision to action by investigating what factors assisted in making meaning of the Iowa school improvement mandates at the local level and what helped to implement the mandates at the classroom level.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methodology was chosen for this research because of the naturalistic perspective it provides. This form of methodology provides data that are descriptive, embedded within a contextual setting, representative of the participants' perspectives, and helps to understand the processes that lead to implementation of a state mandate (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Maxwell, 1996).

Variations and differences in how the state mandate is implemented at the local level cannot be fully predicted nor anticipated. Thus, naturalistic inquiry allows the researcher to capture variations, idiosyncrasies, and characteristics that are unique to each particular context setting (local school district). A qualitative-naturalistic approach is also appropriate for a study where the focus is on improvement, effective implementation, or when the focus is on participants' actions. This is especially critical in the early life of a major implementation effort such as a new state mandate (Patton, 1987). My focus is on capturing processes and activities, documenting variations in application, and exploring individual differences (Patton, 1987; Yin, 1993; Yin, 1994).

Case study methodology was chosen as the research design because it is particularly useful in understanding a particular problem or situation in great depth. The phenomenon in question, developing meaning and applying it in the classroom, can be looked at in much greater detail within the specific context of a school district (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1993). This methodology provides a picture of what is happening and can capture the individual differences from one site to the next. A case study allows you to focus on a current phenomenon in its total context. The researcher is able to observe events as they unfold through the use of multiple sources of data such as interviews with those who are participating in the phenomenon, direct observations, and analysis of written documents (Schloss & Smith, 1998).

Site Selection

One of the considerations in determining the focus priorities of this case study was to look at the issue in depth and detail. Priorities were established in order to focus the study (Patton, 1987). While this school improvement mandate included all grades pre K through 12, this study looked only at the elementary school implementation. The elementary level was selected because two key

elements of revised Iowa Administrative Code, Chapter 12 mandate affect them specifically, components of House File 2272 and House File 743.

My study sample involved two mid-sized districts located in central Iowa within the Area Education Agency 11 service area. Mid-size was defined for this study as having a certified enrollment for 1998–99 of 500 to 2500 students. Two districts that fall within this range were eliminated from the sample pool to avoid possible conflict of interest as I serve as the AEA 11 school improvement primary partner for those two districts.

The knowledge of "expert associates" was used to select the districts used for this study (Schloss & Smith, 1998). Seven individuals, representing the Iowa department of education, several area education agencies, and several school districts, were asked to review a list of mid-sized districts. They were asked to identify three to five districts they felt were involved at the active use level of implementation of H.F. 2272; were moving forward with implementation of the components of H.F. 2272; or in the past exhibited active use of other mandates or innovations. From the responses, I looked for commonalties of identified districts to narrow the sample to two districts.

This process of purposeful judgment sampling was used because the "representativeness" of the sample was less of a concern than selecting sites that complemented the goals of the study. Because this form of sampling does not produce a randomly selected group who represent a broader population, there was a question as to whether or not conclusions drawn from the sample could be generalized to others (Schloss & Smith, 1998). However, the two sites do meet the characteristics of ideal case study sites as identified by Marshall and Rossman (cited in Schloss & Smith, 1998, p.88). These characteristics include: access to the site; the probability that you will find a combination of processes, people, programs, and interactions related to your question; ability to maintain a presence for as long as necessary; and data quality and credibility is reasonably assured.

Initial contact was made by telephone and e-mail with district gatekeepers, individuals from whom consent is required for access, at the two proposed school districts (Schloss & Smith, 1998; Maxwell, 1996). The topic and nature of the research was explained and an initial request for participation was extended. Letters with more specific details on the research questions, methods, confidentiality assurances, and timelines were sent to the superintendent,

curriculum directors, and principals after receiving approval of the dissertation proposal from the superintendent. Follow-up telephone calls were made to confirm participation, answer questions, address concerns about data collection in the buildings, and to schedule the interviews and site-visits (Monrad & Norman, 1992).

Procedures

The predominant methods for collecting data I used were semi-structured on-site interviews (see Appendix D) and classroom observations. Interviews provided data that offered detailed descriptions, multiple perspectives, interpretations of events, and an inside view of attitudes and processes (Weiss, 1994). The purpose of the observational data was to describe classroom applications clearly and carefully. The data reports included sufficient descriptive detail to allow me to know what occurred and how it occurred, thus allowing the development of an insider's view without really being there (Patton, 1987).

A "Human Subjects Consent Form" (see Appendix B) was developed and an explanation of the study was provided to each of the participants (Creswell, 1998; Monrad & Norman, 1992) at the beginning of each interview and the classroom observations. Each interviewee was also provided with a historical timeline of the Iowa school improvement mandates (see Appendix C).

In addition to interviews and observations, an analysis of local documents offered personalized insights and allowed participants' voices to be heard without interference (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The state and district documents included: public records (e.g., Iowa Code and Administrative Rules, Iowa Department of Education technical assistance manual, district comprehensive school improvement plan, meeting minutes), physical materials (e.g., curriculum maps, building plans, action plans), and research generated documents (e.g., classroom observations, interview transcripts, field notes, contact summaries).

To create a "conversation with a purpose" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 268) a semi-structured set of questions was developed for the interviews. The main research questions guided the development of a set of open-ended interview questions. The interview process involved asking open ended questions, listening to and recording the answers, and following up or probing deeper with additional relevant questions. An interview protocol guide was prepared to make sure there was consistency in obtaining information from participants. In addition to controlling researcher bias, it helped to make the interviewing process more systematic and comprehensive by creating a similar structure for each interview (Patton, 1987). Several teachers from districts not involved in this study were

used to further define and clarify the questions before actual use with interviewees to assure appropriateness and understandability (Krueger, 1994).

Elite interviewing (Marshall & Rossman, 1989) was chosen as the methodology in the districts because it provided information from educators that were well-informed about the school improvement mandates, had expertise in the research study areas, and were involved in district implementation efforts. Elites were able to contribute "insight and meaning to the interview process because they are intelligent and quick thinking people, at home in the realm of ideas, policies, and generalizations" (p. 95).

The teachers interviewed were selected in consultation with the school's principal and central office administration. Where possible, teachers with knowledge and involvement with the district efforts in comprehensive school improvement planning were selected to provide a knowledgeable and helpful sample.

The interviews were conducted on site and were audio taped for later verbatim transcription by a third party. Field notes were kept for backup support (Weiss, 1994). Inductive coding was used to analyze the transcripts and documents for emerging themes and topics. A set of possible coding

labels/categories was created during the interviewing process with additional codes added, clarified, and changed each time the transcripts and documents were read (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The codes were organized into various "families" or schemes for analysis. The chunks of data were managed and manipulated for ease of coding utilizing Microsoft Word 98 software. The interview files were then available to be handled separately or in groups as I progressed through the analysis stage. A separate coding system was developed and used on each piece of data so that it could be tracked back to the original source (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Weiss, 1994).

Results and Findings

Site visits for interviews and classroom observations were scheduled for one building at a time to keep the initial interactions with the data consistent and focused (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). A number of factors (e.g., blizzards, illness, and school closings) created some problems in being able to complete the interviews in one district before moving on to the second district. The analysis of individual district data was completed at separate times with one district summary being in draft form before beginning the second district.

The focus in analyzing the data collected came from the questions generated at the beginning of the research process. Inductive analysis was used to discover the patterns, themes, and categories developed from the data through the coding process. The iterative process of continually sorting, searching through, arranging, and synthesizing transcripts, field notes, observations, and other materials lead to understanding the data and an evolution of the story behind the data that could be shared with others. Making sense out of the data occurred both during and after the collection process with patterns developing to describe the phenomenon of local implementation of school improvement mandates (Patton, 1987; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Data are presented in Chapter 4 as individual district descriptions that highlight the context, process, and classroom applications that occurred in each district. In addition to the narrative descriptions, data are displayed in a concept web that diagrams the patterns and themes discovered. A general summary of the common patterns and themes is also included.

The common themes and patterns identified cross data sources and interviewees and appear in a more linear form in the descriptions provided in Chapter 4. The elements, patterns, and themes in each of the concept webs

reflect the complex story of school improvement as told by the teachers and administrators in the two districts. These webs show three levels of ideas and the direct (solid lines) interactions and relationships and the indirect (dashed lines) interactions and influences among them. The concept webs developed as a way to organize the multi-faceted and complex ideas that emerged as the individual district stories unfolded.

Potential Limitations/Validity Threats

Being able to trust results of research begins with recognizing what potential limitations exist in the design and nature of the research study (Merriam, 1998). This case study design has several characteristics that need to be identified as potential limitations to the study or threats to the validity of the study:

- The lack of generalizability or representativeness
- Description of a phenomenon not a predictive study
- Data are based on the constructions and perceptions of the individuals involved
- Subjective perceptions and biases of the researcher
- Influence of the researcher on setting/participants—reactivity (Maxwell, 1996).

The two districts involved in this study are served by the area education agency for which I am employed. In order to control researcher bias and subjectivity, I was careful to follow the interview protocol and set interview questions. The teachers were selected solely by the district administrators or by volunteering. Copies of the analysis of the data were sent to each district for review and an accuracy check.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an issue related to persuading the reader and the researcher that the findings of the study are worth paying attention to, have some "truth value," and consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Several methods were used in the data collection, analysis, and reporting stages to establish trustworthiness: triangulation through the use of multiple sources of data and multiple participants; informal member checks after transcribing interviews and writing site summary; archiving copies of the coded transcripts/documents; maintaining copies of audio tapes; maintaining an audit trail; and utilizing actual words of participants in development of coding labels and in the reporting of the findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Weiss, 1994). Collecting information and data from a range of individuals and sites and using a variety of

data collection methods reduces the risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to a specific method (Merriam, 1998; Maxwell, 1996).

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

In this chapter, data generated through on-site interviews, document review, and classroom observations in two central Iowa school districts, are presented as individual district descriptions. The interviews were conducted in the elementary buildings over a two and a half month period. My original plan to keep the interviews in each of the districts as separate as possible was changed due to changes in participant schedules, holiday breaks, the researcher's bout with laryngitis, and several snow storms. To keep the data and the emerging themes true to the individual districts, the iterative analysis of the data using constant comparison methodology was done one district at a time (Lincoln & Gruba, 1985.) This method maintained the integrity of each sight and avoided possible comparisons between the two sites.

School A

School District A is a mid-sized school district in central Iowa with a student population of around 2100 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The district has approximately 160 teachers who are housed in five buildings around their community. This district is located within the suburban

outer ring of the capital city. It has been experiencing a moderate increase in enrollment for the past eleven years but continues to maintain its place among the lowest taxable valuation districts in the state.

The students in District A have a graduation rate of 98% with the fourth graders in the district scoring in the proficient or advanced performance levels in reading at a rate of 72.3% and in math at a rate of 77.4% as measured by the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills for 1999-2000 and reported in their district Annual Progress Report.

There are three elementary buildings in the district. Each building has a different grade level configuration with one housing kindergarten through second grade students, a second one housing third through fifth grade students, and the third building housing first through fifth grade students in multi-age classrooms. Teachers are involved in building level improvement teams, district-wide improvement teams, and the community school improvement advisory committee.

The building principals suggested teachers from the district-wide improvement teams to be among the first interviewed and then asked for volunteers who were also interested in participating in the interviews. A total of ten teachers and four administrators (superintendent, curriculum director, and

two principals) were interviewed and five of the interviewed teachers were randomly selected for classroom observations.

Strategic Planning

The district actually began a strategic planning process in 1991 with a committee that reflected membership from all major components of the community such as students, parents, teachers/administrators, retired constituents, civic leaders, business representatives, and city council members. The strategic planning process was intended to place "the district in charge of what will happen to better control change rather than have change control what the district does." It includes four areas that are reviewed at least twice a year by the School Improvement Advisory Committee: "1) what we believe (mission); 2) where we are (environmental scans); 3) where we want to be (goals and objectives for the year and beyond); and 4) how we are going to get there (action plans."

The mission of the district that helped to guide the strategic planning is a focus not only for the students of the district, but also for the adults who work and teach in the district as you will see in the data analysis to follow (Sivadge, personal communication, 2001).

> Our primary mission is to provide maximum learning opportunities in a safe environment for all children of the district. We are committed to treating each student as an individual by improving skills, knowledge, and the overall wisdom necessary to assume a role in adult society where each may make a positive contribution to their community and remain a life-long learner.

Mandate

The school improvement mandate was created in Iowa in 1998 and was delivered to School District A in the form of revised Chapter 12 administrative code/rules and the *Technical Assistance for Comprehensive School Improvement Manual* in 1999. The reactions of the teachers and administrators to the school improvement mandate included grudging acceptance from some. "You've got to do it. It's mandated. There is no way out of it. I think everybody has resigned themselves to the fact that the legislators and the powers that be are convinced that they need to make a bad system better instead of scraping the old system and making a new system really good." Another stated, "we have to do this. We dance the dance. So we're going to do it. We're going to smile. You're going to see what you are doing is doing the right thing."

On the other hand, others responded with an openness to the possible benefits and contributions that the school improvement mandate could make to the teaching and learning in the district: "I think it's good. There needs to be some rules that we need to have set and that we need to try to meet those needs for the betterment of the kids." One teacher saw the mandate as a reflection of her professional responsibility. "What I was going to do I would have done anyway whether they told me to do it or not. I did it because I was improving in my own classroom."

Still other teachers and administrators made connections to what has already been going on in the district: "This has been kind of a work in progress so it wasn't a shock to us and it wasn't like we had to pull things from no where." Another thought that "just the experience of all the things our district has been doing all these years just kind of helped."

One teacher went on to point out the possible value of the school improvement mandate coming from the state as opposed to the district administration in relation to accepting and carrying out the mandate:

> ... I see the people here accepting it better if it's a mandate from the state because that they feel is out of their control. If it's just a mandate from the

district they tend to feel they can fight back. As it comes from state and federal they still resent it, but they don't have time or energy to go fight with the state or the federal government. They would if it was somebody right in the building.

During the interviews, a number of the teachers asked for an explanation of the school improvement mandate, seeming to be unsure of exactly what were H.F. 2272 and H.F. 743. However, it soon became evident that while they did not identify with the titles of the school improvement mandates, they were confident in sharing what they were doing in the district with respect to accountability, content standards, instruction, assessment, and class size. These areas, critical components of the mandates, were part of their day-to-day experiences and were things they could talk about easily. Many teachers described not only what the district was doing in relation to these areas, but also what they, as teachers, were doing in their classrooms and on district committees to meet the mandate requirements.

Content Standards and Instruction

A change occurred in classroom instruction because of the focus and direction provided by the content standards. The content standards helped to

narrow curriculum down to the essential concepts and clearly identified what teachers were responsible for teaching. Several teachers shared their thoughts regarding content standards and the influence of the standards on instruction. As one teacher put it,

> I think it's going to help us as teachers to put together our curriculum and our resources and our enrichment and our re-teaching things in more organized fashion. Because we're not going to be feeling so overwhelmed with the whole picture. The standards and the benchmarks are going to narrow things down for us in time.

Another teacher felt that refining the standards and benchmarks would improve teaching.

> And standards and benchmarks and I think I spoke to that before that when we kind of pared them down to just a few that we thought were important for the grade level, I think it helped us that we take and focus on those standards and benchmarks and not worry about the rest of the things that we were trying to teach. We're going to do a better job of teaching.

The close alignment of the content standards with instruction was described by several of the teachers interviewed with one teacher summarizing

her thoughts with the comment: "It might be we're just feeling we know these things need to be gotten in place. We know that. I think it's going to help us as teachers to put together our curriculum and our resources and our enrichment and our re-teaching things in more organized fashion."

An important link between decision–making for instruction and the data collected in regards to standards was noted by one teacher who shared this perspective: "So I see that as a major challenge I have in the future is to make sure that the data we collect with the assessments that are required because of H.F. 2272 actually drives instruction, that we make high stakes decisions based on that data we are collecting."

Accountability

A sense of accountability was an area that teachers talked about with confidence. They shared thoughts about the relationship of accountability with both teaching and assessment, especially when using multiple measures to consciously look at what children were able to do and how that would be demonstrated to stakeholders. "Everything comes back to accountability and how we will be able to prove to the state and to our stakeholders that kids are achieving the way they need to achieve." However, accountability was also seen

as having a more personal impact in forcing teachers to be more self-reflective. "I think it's just bringing it to a conscious level that this is what we are doing and this is why we are doing it and I guess it is really putting some thought into the test we are giving and why."

Finally, accountability was seen as a major help in bringing to light the areas in which children were succeeding:

> Oh, I think its going to be a very big role because I think the – I don't want to say old fashioned – but the way of assessing kids from the past has been okay, but it can't be the only assessment that we have because every child is different in the way they express or the way they share their learning and one kid who may not be a paper/pencil assessor might do better with an oral kind of a thing or show me kind of thing so I think different assessments are going to give us a total picture where a student is in their learning.

A number of the teachers saw assessment as the focal point for showing children's growth and success. Their importance was summed up by the teacher who stated, "And then the assessments are important, too, because we need

something to show the child's development throughout the years. That's very important."

Class Size

One of the main focuses of H.F. 743 was the reduction of class sizes for instruction in the basics for students in classes kindergarten through 3rd grade. The interest in the benefits for reduced class sizes was shared by not only kindergarten through 3rd grade teachers, but also special education teachers, teachers of special subjects, and teachers in 4th and 5th grades. The link between class size and effective instruction was pointed out by both administrators and teachers with one teacher capturing the essence of their thinking when she stated, "But I think that is a very important component, the class size issue. It is hard to teach 24 and 25 kinds in one class effectively." The importance of smaller class sizes also proved to be of interest to the teachers who taught the upper elementary grades. After commenting about observing what could happen in the lower elementary grade with lower class sizes, an upper elementary teacher commented, "I really feel like smaller class sizes in the 4th and 5th grade are just as important as 3rd grade, especially having extra help in the reading and math areas, because those are the things that are taking you on to life long skills. I

think that we're finding that there is a wider range of learning within our kids within one classroom." While no evidence was offered supporting the influence of class size on student achievement, it was a strongly held assumption of the teachers who commented.

Culture and Vision of the District

The overall knowledge of and reaction to the school improvement mandate in this district was influenced by its history and the culture that had been established. There was a belief and an expectation that what happened in planning, teaching, and assessing should always focus on quality and what was good for students. The words "what's good for kids" punctuated almost every educators' comments at some point in the interviews. One administrator stated, "I think ... the level of professionalism in this district is so high that I feel that it's like, 'okay, that's the mandate. What's the best thing to do for the kids?'" A teacher wanted it noted that it was not the adults that were at the center of decisions and actions in the district, but rather, it was the children, "What we are reading and are trying to do is what's best for children. Not what's best for us or what looks best on paper, but what's best for children and I think that's what our school is about."

An expectation of excellence and professionalism was an underlying theme expressed by administrators and both experienced and new-to-the-district teachers. One administrator also shared that this expectation was shared by not only the educators in the district, but also the school board members and the community at large, "I think the school board—it starts with the school board and our community. Both have very high expectations for us. Much higher than I think they have for themselves sometimes, but they have very high expectations for us."

Although the school improvement mandate required new forms of accountability and practice in the state, this district seemed to just take it in stride, assimilating it into their current practices. One administrator summed it up by saying, "what I'm telling you now is you don't have to tell the teachers in this building to strive for achievement. They are doing it on their own."

Another pattern that appeared in the interviews was related to the vision provided by the leadership in the district and how this positioned the district to respond to the school improvement mandate. The questions that guided the district's thinking included: "Where do we want to be? What do we need to do to get there? and How can we help people get there?" There was also a sense that

the administrators, especially in the central office, stayed aware of upcoming trends and helped the district to then focus on what was best for students.

The curriculum director and the current and previous superintendents were mentioned a number of times as the key figures in guiding and supporting the district efforts. "I think that the administration and the administrative team has done a really good job of focusing us on how what we do impacts kids," said one teacher. Another added, "I mean, I think they really had been on the bandwagon and knew it was coming and had been aware for some time so I think we've been pretty well prepared each step along the way. Waaaaaay in advance of when we had any idea what was even going on." A third educator in the district talked about the key role the curriculum director played in the school improvement process: "Somebody has to have a global idea of where you're going and of course, that is always our curriculum director who has guided. I think we are always foggy to start on what the expectations are, but I think she had the vision of where we are going and leads us through the process and I think that is the key thing."

It was obvious what a critical role that the central office played in developing capacity in the district to respond to the school improvement

mandates. Both district and school administrators were instrumental in establishing an environment of high expectation in responding to changes. The importance of the mandates was communicated but it was combined with information and support .

Support Structures

The support that teachers in the district felt they received from the administrators and the support that the administrators felt they received from each other was a critical part of the district structure in responding to the school improvement mandate. One teacher shared, "You know, because of our administration that it will be taken care of."

The support reported took several different forms. For some teachers it was the confidence that with their administrators knowledgeable and in charge, all would work out well: "And that's all because (curriculum director) can pretty much keep us in line and separate out the stuff that's nice to have and the stuff that you really need to have." For others, it was the responsiveness of the administrators to their needs, questions, and stress levels.

A number of outside resources and agencies were also cited as providing support and assistance to the district as they worked to develop their

comprehensive school improvement plan and to align their standards, benchmarks, and assessments. These additional sources of support included a variety of networking groups available to the superintendent, curriculum director, and principals; consulting services from the Iowa Department of Education and the area education agency; and financial assistance from a Goals 2000 grant and Phase III (state monies for teacher professional growth.)

Even with support and leadership from the district, it was evident that the teachers and administrators both felt that trying to implement the requirements of the school improvement mandate had increased the stress levels and the feelings of overload. Teachers were concerned that the additional expectations required by the school improvement mandate might negatively impact their performance in the classroom as they tried to add more duties and requirements to the same number of hours in the school day. "Frustrated" was the way one teacher described herself as she shared:

> they can put too many things on a teacher at once. If we are in overload, we are not going to do well. That's probably really important. Then to inform the teachers what the new implementation of whatever it may be is

> about. If we're well informed and know the direction we're going, then we're willing and can go ahead and implement it in the classroom. We just need to be informed, but not overloaded.

Another teacher shared her perspective in the form of a metaphor of an overloaded plate where things keep getting added to her plate and nothing is ever taken away and she has the same number of hours in a day to figure out "how do I shuffle all of this things that I am responsible for?"

Administrators shared these concerns not only from the perspective of the impact on the classrooms but also from the point of how they saw their work and time to support teachers being affected. One administrator shared her viewpoint:

> I don't disagree with the accountability and I don't disagree with the standards and benchmarks. I think it really causes us to focus. I just kind of wish we had made a little more time to get everything done and get everything in place because it is a lot of stress. It's really diverting me away from what I want to do and that is to be a principal in my school and be involved with my teachers and students.

As a result of the administration listening to and watching for the things that were creating stress and frustration, an important form of support that the

teachers acknowledged was that of advocacy and responsiveness to their needs. Administrators needed to pay attention to what was said by teachers, how it was said, and how teachers behaved as new information was provided and new requests were made of teachers to prevent the feelings of "being overwhelmed," "being stressed out," or being "overloaded." One teacher described the actions of the administrators who "worked with us as teachers. I think they've been very helpful, our district has. If we have problems, if we don't feel good about something than I think they really worked at helping you feel better about what you have to do."

A sensitivity to overload and stress levels was important to assure that implementation efforts continued to move forward as too much pressure and too many requirements might have reverses the positive effects the school district was experiencing.

Time was often an issue that created these feelings so the district tried to keep much of the work involved in developing standards, benchmarks, and assessments within the confines of the contract day of the teachers or during the scheduled professional development opportunities. Time was also an issue in providing opportunities for new learning and for practicing new knowledge and

skills. "From a district standpoint you have to give support, you have to give the staff development and the training and those kinds of things, and then you have give them time to practice those kinds of things" was an example of an administrative reply that was cited by several teachers as an important response to their needs. They also felt that the encouragement they received was critical for using the new things they learned: "I know they are wonderful in saying it's really you that carry it out, but it would never have been carried out if it were not for all their background work and their encouragement."

Structures for Wide-Spread Involvement

Broad-based ownership and understanding of the requirements of the school improvement mandate were necessary for the district to move beyond simple compliance to implementation as part of the day-to-day operations of the district. To do this, the district utilized a structure, study teams, that was already part of their operating structure. This structure took advantage of the district's "habit of working as a team" to join together administrators and teachers in the school improvement efforts. An administrator explained that the study team structure "has paid big dividends for us because that is just our way of doing business—the structure of how we do staff development or how we take a look at

what we are doing. I think it is helpful. A common structure to start with and I think that study teams is the kind of cement that lets us (do school improvement) and it's kind of a communication vehicle, too, you know, from study team to building improvement team."

Study teams also allowed opportunities for open communication, dialogue, and the transfer of information among buildings, grade levels, and the central office. With study teams in place, the district was able to move forward without a delay to respond to the mandate. A teacher shared, "our staff was all set up to use that (study teams) when and whatever it was we were asked to do. That part of the framework was set up and ready to go."

The study team structure provided a mechanism not only for communication, but it also allowed information and ideas to be processed, discussed, and synthesized in a way that created opportunities to develop understanding and to reach consensus on meaning and possible actions. Information filtered through teachers to other teachers so it began to become part of regular teacher talk instead of "an order issued from on high." The ongoing meetings also provided an opportunity to revisit ideas and actions and to break down the information and actions into "doable amounts at a time."

Another positive aspect of using study teams was that it allowed teachers from various grade levels to share their view points, ideas, and perspectives of how everything fit into a pre-kindergarten through 12th grade system. This opportunity to share and the continuity it created was explained by one teacher this way, "I think what's most meaningful is when you meet in a small group and you're involved in being responsible for doing whatever so when they come to you when the other committee comes and says this is what you have to do in math, they understand because they've just been doing the same thing in language arts." It was the general feeling of both teachers and administrators that teamwork was a natural part of the district culture and was simply "the way we do things here."

The study teams and other district teams provided a way for information to travel "from the top to the bottom and from the bottom to the top" and for staff and the community to feel that they had opportunities for input into district policies and practices as well as choice in what the school improvement mandate would look and feel like in classrooms and buildings in the district. The opportunities for input were an important consideration for teachers. As one teacher explained, "our input is valued in that we are respected for what we know

and our opinions and that we've had some choice in what's happened." Another teacher described her involvement this way, "sitting in on the committees, you know, instead of being told what it is I'm going to teach that I have some say in the whole process is kind of critical in my mind."

Involvement from a variety of groups, both inside and outside the district, was important if there was going to be generalized ownership and support for the work involved in creating the comprehensive school improvement plan and in refining the district standards, benchmarks, and assessments. The comments made during the interviews demonstrated that the concept of involvement was not just talk heard from the administrators, but an established norm that was recognized by the teachers. All teachers and administrators are involved in some committee or study team focusing on standards/benchmarks or assessments.

Some committees and study teams in the district involved school board members, parents, and community members in the process. Several teachers shared the reasons they felt it was important and valuable to involve individuals from the community. Involving community members and parents "lent some credibility with other community members" and it also helped them to feel "part of the school system and then they can stand by the school system." The shared

opportunities for input helped the district and community to "work together to educate their children."

Professional Growth and Development

In addition to the study teams that function as the work committees, study teams were also used as a way to disseminate information and research, to provide opportunities for practice, and to provide some of the needed district staff development. The expectation was to use what was studied in the classroom—to move from just information to actual application. To accomplish this, the curriculum director and principals often supplied teachers with research-based information to discuss, speakers that addressed future trends, and opportunities to try out instructional strategies in their classrooms. One perspective that was shared by a teacher related to the comprehensiveness of the professional growth experiences: "If you are not thoroughly trained in any one thing, but trained in bits and pieces of a lot of things, that doesn't work. You have to be thoroughly trained in each one and take them one at a time." The value of ongoing and focused professional development was highlighted by several teachers with one teacher stating, "It's not a here today, gone tomorrow type thing and hasn't been for a

long time and people are given the opportunity to learn it and have time to use it and explore it and talk about it rather than here is the expectation, now do it."

District-wide staff development, supplemented by study team meetings, was held eight times a year during the once a month early out days and was provided by both internal and external trainers on topics suggested by staff and on topics determined by the skills and knowledge-base needed to complete the work guided by the district comprehensive school improvement plan. Some subjects mentioned by the teachers as topics for both study team and district training included: Assessment, Rubrics, Cooperative Learning, Brain Research, Standards and Benchmarks, Study Teams, Portfolios, Technology, Writing Process (6-Trait writing), Reading, and Frameworks for Professional Practice. The district also supported conferences and graduate classes for individual teachers and had an extensive induction and mentoring program designed to support teachers new to the district in "a practical way." Professional growth and development was approached in this district in a holistic, intensive and deliberate manner that created capacity and supported staff.

Common Understanding

Developing a common understanding in the district of the components and requirements of the school improvement mandate took time but it was crucial to implementation system-wide. The development of this understanding was a concern for both administrators and teachers as they strove to make the mandate meaningful and purposeful in their work.

Apprehension and increased stress were concerns expressed by teachers as possible outcomes if the mandate was not understood at the classroom level. Teachers were interested in knowing "what exactly do they want me to do," "what do they mean by...?" and most importantly, "what does this all mean to me?" Additionally, teachers wanted to "see a purpose." "I think once everyone has an idea of what they're supposed to do, what is expected, then I think you feel good about it as you understand it, you can go ahead and implement it at your grade level." With an understanding and a purpose, teachers felt they could respond to the mandate with action. "They will take that piece and apply it to what you do so it is real life experiences that you are doing and taking what you are doing and making it meaningful and its not like I have to reinvent something. Its I take that and use it with something I am already using so I like that piece of it, too."

In order to develop the common understanding, information needed to be provided over a period of time in a variety of forms. Teachers in School District A mentioned a number of ways through which they received information about the requirements of school improvement mandates and the connections to their district: study team meetings, written materials, presentations at various meetings, memos, staff development days, advisory committee minutes, school board meetings, newsletters, and research articles.

The teachers also had suggestions for how the information should be presented to them and the role the curriculum director played in helping to understand the information. It was important that the information was presented in a manner that was "short and succinct" without "all gibberish and educationalese that we can't understand when it comes down to helping little Joey in math." In other words, it needed to be easy to understand and expressed in a way that was meaningful to the teacher in the classroom. The curriculum director was the one who often had the job to "separate out the stuff that's nice to have and the stuff that you really need to have." She was also the one who helped to provide the information in a way that allowed the teachers "to be informed, but not overloaded."

The ongoing efforts to develop understanding, create personal meaning, and move towards implementation was perhaps best summarized by a teacher who commented: "It's been a long journey, but it's been an interesting one. It has been a hard working one to get there with a lot of discussion that had to take place." In this district, school improvement was a journey with a goal, but the exact destination evolved through the process.

Challenges

The journey that School District A was involved in was not without concerns, frustrations, complaints, and challenges. As with any change, not everyone joined the process willingly and with complete understanding and enthusiasm. Some challenges presented themselves as groups worked with the actual legislation and the subsequent rule interpretations made by the department of education.

One challenge and possible resolution was inherent in the structure of working in teams. Teachers needed to be able to communicate with each other and reach consensus before they were able to move on. A teacher summarized this challenge by saying, "I think working in groups is always difficult to get consensus but I think the process of hashing it out is the thing that helps the

most, listening to everyone's ideas." Teaming was a process that had to be developed as vital part of the district infrastructure that supported the school improvement efforts.

The challenge of reaching consensus was sometimes exacerbated by the task of trying to understand the language of the mandate itself and the various interpretations that were made by the department of education, the district administrators, and district teachers. When asked about challenges, one teacher stated, "Sometimes the language. I mean you have to read it, if they would just put it in language that is easy to understand. I thought this meant that, then it's all up to interpretation." An administrator expressed that perhaps part of the problem of understanding the mandate was the result of interpretations from staff at the department of education or legislators who were removed from the day-to-day operations of the classroom. He stated, "There is a lot of really good things they (DE) could be doing and I am sure they are doing it, but thinking up what schools should be doing when they haven't been in the school for 20 years is not one of them. The legislators are even worse, I mean, thank God we have somebody like (Legislator A) down there who knows a little bit about education."

The language of mandates and subsequent administrative rules needs to be clear. Vague language or intent leads to the predictable consequence of organizational confusion and perhaps unintended outcomes. Developing a personal understanding of a mandate can create variability in and of itself, without adding additional confusion from an unclear mandate.

Another major concern expressed, mainly by administrators, were the rule changes from the department of education and the timing of the rule changes. While some of the timing issues were a result of parameters set by the legislature in the passage of the school improvement mandate others were a result of changes in federal requirements for Title I funding. At the local level, some of the logic and understanding for the changes was lost in the frustration and emotion of having to make changes in a short timeframe. Also, the feeling that local control was not only lost but that a district would actually be at a disadvantage to try to stay in the forefront of research-based practices and trends caused administrators and teachers to be somewhat reluctant to keep moving forward when there was a chance they'd be "yanked back" when trying to be proactive. One teacher expressed concern when she said, "You do it and you think you have a quality product that works well for your classroom, your building, and your

district and then for the next level to tell you, no, you can't use it. Now go reinvent something else." Another teacher asked these questions, "Are they going to use or reward districts that are in line with this, and other districts that aren't? I mean is it beneficial for us to get all our ducks in a row early so we could end up redoing?" Having their time and efforts respected was a definite concern.

As teachers began to understand the components of the school improvement mandate and created their own mental models of what that meant to classroom practices, concerns were voiced and philosophical differences were explored. Many times questions remained and discussion occurred in an effort to resolve the cognitive dissonance between their beliefs and the mandates requirements. Some looked upon it as a challenge and others as an opportunity to learn and create change.

Time

The need to have time to assimilate new information and then practice new skills in the classroom was a concern, especially with the constraints that the school day and school year provide. Time was needed to not only "figure it out in practicality where it fits into daily what I do with my kids," but also to have "time to read all the things that are necessary to be read so that you have an

understanding of where we are going" and finally, "time to practice those kind of things." Related to the idea of having the time, was the concern expressed by a teacher of when that time would be made available and how it would fit into a teacher's work schedule:

> But it is school time provided to do that and I think that's really important because you know, I don't think sometimes non-educators understand because the expectation has always been the teachers will come on their own time to do those things. But yet, that's not something that business ever requires so in my mind it is being treated as the professional and I really like that because that's not been the case in my twenty some years of teaching. The expectation was I was accountable for it but I had to acquire it on my own time and in my own way. I like that we are getting away from that.

Student Assessment

Perhaps the area that created the most discussion and the one in which teachers and administrators experienced the greatest discomfort was assessing the students. Not one teacher nor administrator disagreed with the concept of assessment or multiple measures of achievement, but rather, they expressed

concerns about the amount of time the new assessment requirements were taking away from instruction and direct interactions with students. One teacher expressed it this way, "I think that is everyone's real concern. Are we so involved with testing the kids that we can't teach? We've got to be teachers, too, and when do you do all this testing? That really is everybody's concern." Another teacher talked about the balancing act in the classroom that takes place between teaching and assessing when she said,

> so my biggest feeling is while the assessments may give me good information to use with my children, I want to make sure that the information does not take up my teaching time. I want it to be valuable, but I also don't want it to be time consuming. You have to decide is it more time consuming than it is valuable.

Besides the time factor, there were also philosophical concerns about the relative importance of some of the assessments and whether a standardized test score could really capture the growth that a student experienced during the year. Teachers were concerned that assessment should guide their work with the students instead of ranking the students for some state list. Here is how two

teachers summed up what might happen if the role of assessment became to narrow:

> I think we've been once again been made to feel like assessment is more important than actually being with the children trying to figure out where they are, their level intellectually instead, it almost like we've got to spend more time using a test that we don't necessarily believe in to get information that really doesn't tell what our children are doing.

> You know, it shouldn't be that we are comparing that kind of thing. What we need to be doing is how are our kids achieving. What are our expectations? Are they meeting that and then what is it we are going to do as educators to increase that achievement? We do need to do that. I'm not saying that we shouldn't take standardized tests, but I think we need to be careful with what we do with those results and how we look at those. But it is what drives everything and I think it's going to take changes from the university level and move it all the way because we can't change that piece because what do they look at for kids to get into college. They look

> at those standardized tests scores and those kind of things. So I know that's important but I think it's going to have to be a systemic kind of thing, not just a piecemeal.

The benefits of assessing students using multiple formats was recognized by a number of the teachers. They were interested in assessments that could provide information that would direct their teaching; provide feedback to the students and parents; and be flexible enough to respond to the developmental changes of the students. The key was to keep assessment in perspective as they teach. This guidance was offered by one of the teachers:

> I think there can be some positive if we don't lose sight that we're still teaching or guiding or facilitating the children and not teach to the test, teach certain things and as far as the mandate goes. I really like the individual testing and showing and the multiple ways of testing. I just hope that they really view all of those ways they give each one as much weight as another. I worry about these times tests being more important and holding more value in some people's eyes than others.

Alignment and Focus

One of the overall themes that emerged with widespread agreement was the influence of the school improvement mandate in focusing and aligning the curriculum, instruction, and assessment efforts in the district. Data supporting the theme came from what was observed in the buildings and classrooms. Standards, benchmarks, and curriculum goals were posted in many of the classrooms and hallways and were reflected in a number of teachers' daily lesson plans. Other data appeared in the comments made by a majority of the teachers and administrators that were interviewed, the questions they asked themselves, and the efforts to coordinate between grade levels. Alignment occurred in the district on both the macro level (programs, initiatives, curriculum) and at the micro level (teaching and learning in the classroom.)

> I think probably people are maybe becoming more accountable in exactly what they are teaching and probably thinking more, "Am I covering the things that I should cover? Are the kids learning what they should learn?" And through more precise testing, I guess, we're thinking more about are they learning the things they should at this particular age compared to how are we doing compared to others. You know is our district a little bit lower.

> Are we a little bit higher? Are we covering the things we should be? And I guess that's – and probably we've come up with better tools to test the kids and then it helps us be better teachers in that aspect because we kind of work on it as a group or grade level and figure out what works best for us.

One of the items created in response to the mandate, the comprehensive school improvement plan (CSIP), helped to guide much of the alignment that occurred in the district. Initiatives and programs that were in place in the district as well as suggested additions were evaluated in light of what was outlined in the district comprehensive school improvement plan. The superintendent explained the use of the district plan is this way:

> because we've had a few things come up just as they would any other year and then we'll say "But let's go back to the plan. And does that really fit in with the plan? Or not." Obviously things are going to crop up that you didn't even know existed when we wrote the plan but here is the revision we've made and what's the rationale for making it. It's stopped a couple of things to at least make us think twice.

A principal shared that the plan also helped staff to view the district from a systemic perspective when it came to accountability:

> So as far as the organization and structures that are really going to encourage the type of accountability that the state mandates are requiring, I think what it means is taking a look at our system as a whole and the different pieces – are they all interconnected, are they all tied back to our core of common beliefs and we have a ways to go. We're working at it one thing at a time, but that's where we need to get to.

Teachers shared a different perspective when it came to alignment and a having a more defined focus in the district. They approached the school improvement mandate efforts from the stance of what it did for curriculum and instruction. For them, the impact was sometimes personal and sometimes by or across grade levels. "I think it focuses on the broad expectations on where we are taking students rather than each teacher being strictly focused on their grade level and not seeing the continuity of where they are going or how it connects with other levels. That's probably the big thing as I look at it right now."

They saw connectedness in curriculum and the identification essential learnings as the key factors. The interrelatedness of curriculum, instruction, and

assessment became clear. As one teacher said, "That (the standards and benchmarks) also shows you what's important. If I can't assess it, is it necessary for me to spend my time with my kids doing this?" Another teacher summarized it this way:

> Well, I think, I guess, that the standards and benchmarks are very important in that hopefully, we will all be teaching the same thing and not teaching things that we shouldn't be teaching at our grade level and stick to the things that are most important at our grade level because a lot of teachers when they come in don't really know what should I be teaching. What are the most important things.

Suggestions for Legislators

There were two main areas in which the teachers and administrators focused their comments in regards to any new legislative proposals. These two areas included funding and talking and/or visiting with educators. The comments that were made reflected feelings not only about new legislative proposals but also about H.F. 2272 and H.F. 743.

Many of the interviewees felt that that before any new legislation was considered or introduced it was critical the legislators have conversations with

those who are actually in the profession so that they get an accurate picture of what is currently happening in the classroom and what intentional or unintentional consequences may occur with new legislation. Teachers were concerned that legislators were listening to and perhaps getting advice from "people who are way out in left field on this who have no idea what goes on a day-to-day basis in the classroom" rather than talking to actual classroom teachers or more importantly, visiting the classroom. They felt legislators needed a "real" picture of what goes on in a classroom today so the visit should be "not just for a few minutes but for a whole day or two days."

The frustration of having someone from the outside looking in and telling teachers what to do was perhaps best expressed by the teacher who said,

> But they are taking my job and telling me how to do it. They don't have educational training to do this. What makes them the expert in this field? I resent that greatly. Not that there doesn't need to be some kind of legislation. I understand that. Not that they shouldn't be involved. They should be. But I think they need to listen to educators and talk to them first before they decide what is good for kids. Not having been in a classroom I don't understand – you know, it may look good on paper and it may sound

> good, but then when they ask me to do it, you know, just like the reading assessment. Okay, this is the reading assessment, we want you to do, but when it takes 35 minutes per student and I've got 25 to 28 students, do they realize how much of my time and while I'm working one on one with that child, what are all of my other kids doing?

The teachers weren't necessarily wanting to have all the say or even the final say, but rather to provide their perspective. They wanted to be listened to for their professional expertise and judgement of what would work. One teacher put it in this context: "Come and visit our classrooms. I mean and I would be the first to admit I have no idea how to idea how to run a business and if I were making mandates from my background, about what the businessmen of (City Y) should do to make (County X) run better I would be an idiot. Get involved some yourself, you know."

The issue of funding was expressed as a great concern with any legislation. The passage of H.F. 2272 included no new monies for the districts and H.F. 743 included some monies for a four year period, but not at the level that would totally fund the recommended class size of 17. School District A is implementing the mandate requirements, but as one teacher stated of her

concern, "So that would be the message, please tie some funding. We'll be accountable on this, you know, prove that it was worth it, but we need some help."

The concerns expressed about the impact of unfunded mandates occurred at both the administration and teacher levels. While the district was already engaged in many of the aspects of the school improvement mandates, the requirements to be in compliance added to the workload and stress levels of the staff. The superintendent expressed, "I am a little concerned. If I were to put some kind of dollar figure to what it has cost us to do this, I am afraid to even say. Our time, effort, it may be the largest unfunded mandate in history." A more direct comment was made by a teacher who stated, "I'd also tell them I've been around for a long time and what it looks like to me is they are asking me for the same little bit of money they have been giving me jump through more hoops to get it." The recommendation from both teachers and administrators was that "they study the financial impact their decision."

With the passage of the school improvement mandates, some things in the district did not change. The district focus remained on students and quality. Teaming is the way the district did business and administrative support was strong

and responsive. However, some things have changed in the way the district focuses its efforts and aligns programs, curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The district has also developed an acute sense of accountability in regards to the increase in achievement for all students. See Figure 1 for a display of the key elements, patterns and themes discovered through the interview process.

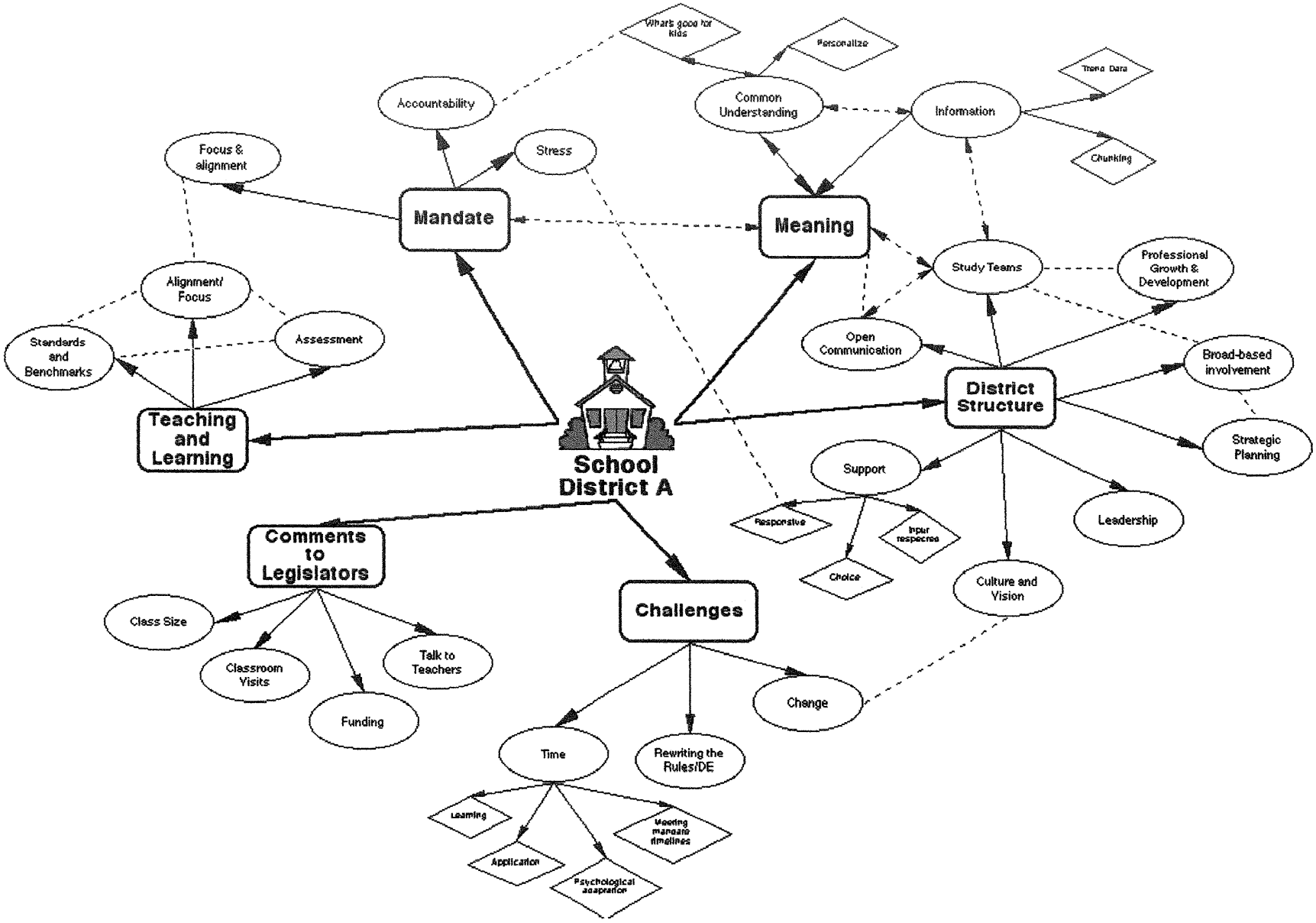

Figure 1. Key elements, patterns and themes from interviews with staff from School District A.

School B

School District B is a rural, consolidated district located in central Iowa with a student population of just over 1500 students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. The district covers 144 square miles where about one third of the students come from the country and two thirds of the students from one of the three communities served by the district. This district is located approximately thirty minutes from a metropolitan area which provides employment opportunities in addition to the local agricultural based production of goods and services. The district has experienced declining enrollment in the last several years but is about 200 students ahead of the enrollment from ten years ago. Students are housed in five buildings with at least one building located in each community.

The students in District B had a graduation rate in 2000 of 100%. The district fourth graders scored in the proficient or advanced performance levels at a rate of 78.8% in reading and 75.9% in math as measured by the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills for 1999-2000 and reported as biennium score in their district Annual Progress Report.

There are three elementary buildings in the district. Each building has a different grade level configuration with one housing pre-kindergarten through

second grade students, a second one housing third through fifth grade students, and the third building housing kindergarten through fifth grade students. Teachers at the elementary level are involved in grade level teams, building teams, district-wide school improvement teams, and the community school improvement advisory committee.

The building principals suggested teachers from the building and district-wide improvement teams to be among the first interviewed and then asked for volunteers who were also interested in participating in the interviews. A total of ten teachers and four administrators (superintendent, curriculum director/principal, and two principals) were interviewed and six of the interviewed teachers were randomly selected for classroom observations.

District History and Vision

District B was involved for a number of years in the development of outcomes for grade levels and content areas before House File 2272 and House File 743, the school improvement mandates, were passed. Teachers, administrators and members of the community worked to develop outcomes that helped to create a district that consisted of "high-performance, results-based

schools which focus and organize their programs and instructional efforts around clearly defined student outcomes."

The previous efforts in developing outcomes helped the district to approach the school improvement mandates in a "business as usual" way. The superintendent shared these thoughts in regards to the district's past work and the new mandates:

> I think primarily the fact that we have been so involved with the outcome-based approach prior to 2272, that we really didn't see a whole lot different. All of our benchmarks were in place. All of our standards were in place. Our community involvement in setting those standards and benchmarks had already been done. We felt a little validation of some of the efforts we'd made, although then it causes us to go to the next logical step and that is setting those student achievement targets and accepting even more accountability that we achieve and ask the question "So what if we don't?" What's next? How do we get it done?

A teacher who had been involved in several committees that developed outcomes shared her perspective, "We were actually doing it already. We just called it something different. But then we just, now we can see that the concept of

benchmarks and the concepts of outcomes really are the same and we have been doing that and working toward that for quite a while and now it seems to be just kind of a part of the whole kit and caboodle."

The work completed by the district prior to the passage of the school improvement mandates did not happen by accident, but rather, through the forward thinking of the district's administration. An administrator in the district stated, "This district has always been I think, really forward thinking and trying to foresee what's going to come down and what are the needs of the students and what are the new things that are out of the research that are going to support any changes that we make." A similar feeling was expressed by a teacher with the comments:

> I really feel like that our district, they've always been, kind of been ahead of what's expected here. I think that, you know, they knew it was coming down, you know, later and they were almost kind of practicing or tried to have it in place way before it was due. I mean that to me said a lot of our district and, you know, I look and feel that they've really tried to help us understand and follow through.

District Culture

The "strong leadership" and "clear beliefs and philosophies" created a culture in the district that supported the development of the assessments,

standards, and benchmarks as required by the school improvement mandates. The administrators that were interviewed discussed what they thought was critical in both a building and district culture to accept and carry out the mandates. "From the organizational perspective, I think there has to be a culture that either exists or is developed – a culture that focuses on student achievement as their primary reason for existence," was how the superintendent described his priorities. He went on to add:

> I think the biggest thing is really the culture of the district. The rules and regulations that come from the 'feds', from the state, certainly have some impact and certainly guide you, but I think the difference between whether you just go through the motions and barely meet the requirements versus getting beyond – going the step from compliance to really engagement. I think that is a culture thing within the district and the degree to which all of us individually truly want to focus on student achievement.

The development of the culture was not just words in the district, but it was how business was done. One of the principals made connections between past practices and the new rules:

> We've been very much engaged in the outcome based education process and so I think to a degree we have now affected the culture in this district that setting curriculum standards, setting student achievement targets is just a way of doing business. I think that made it easier for us to accept the majority of what's involved in these rules.

Additionally, actions of administrators were an important factor. The visits to buildings and classrooms by the superintendent were captured by a principal in this anecdote:

> I think my superintendent is, he is the, an excellent leader for instruction. He could get caught up in so many other things but he has visited my building, sat right by my side, and said, "OK, now why is she doing that?" I explain, "That is shared reading and this is what it values and this is what it does for kids." So I think having THE leader, the internal influence was, has, impacted our classrooms. They all knew he wanted this to happen and for the right reason so I think that is very good.

Another principal shared how she used the teachers in her building to support and expand district efforts, "I mean if you have people right in your own building that are doing things that are right, get them up and let them explain what they

are doing." Teachers were encouraged and allowed to take responsibility and become involved in meaningful ways.

Several teachers also mentioned that their involvement was critical in getting outcomes or the "new standards and benchmarks" to the application level in the classroom. They talked about their committee work of refining district standards and benchmarks and the assessments developed to monitor student progress on achievement of the standards and benchmarks. The committee work also helped teachers to communicate among grade levels:

> Well, of course, you have to be organized and you have to be willing to look at the other grades and be interested in what they are doing. If you just kind of stick to your own then it's kind of like, "well, I don't care what they are doing. I am just doing my own" but I mean you have to be willing to put that effort in to know what everybody else is doing.

Another teacher shared that her involvement in the district efforts of student-involved classroom assessments was because she was "interested in that and also I thought if I taught it then I would get it down better or help facilitate it."

The district culture that encourages the involvement of the teachers and active leadership of the administrators not only helped the district to begin to

meet the requirements of the school improvement mandates but also supported the vision of the district that "all students at (School District B) will be academically prepared for success in adult life, responsible citizenship, future learning, and productive employment" for both students and staff.

Mandate

With the arrival of the revised Chapter 12 administrative code/rules and the *Technical Assistance for Comprehensive School Improvement Manual* in 1999, School District B began to assimilate the requirements into district practice. For the most part, the teachers and administrators accepted the mandates as a clarification of what they had been doing. One administrator expressed the acceptance this way:

> I think at first it – at first I think the teachers saw that as "Oh another thing we had to do for the State." And we have been working at trying to get them to realize this is something we need to do to be our own accountability and try to make it part of what we are already doing and not another thing for them to do.

Regarding the new mandate, a teacher posed the question, "Is it all for the good of the kids or is it a mandate sorting out how can you meet what the State wants you to do to help the kids the most?"

Another teacher shared that understanding the reasons behind the mandates helped make any changes to current practices easier to accept: "However, if these things would have been dropped on us in such a way that we were expected to change but not understand why and the whole process, I think it would have been a very dangerous situation and you would have had a lot of upset teachers not doing their jobs well." Instead, administrators helped the teachers to look upon the mandates as a way to improve practice. One principal described the mandate as a way to "make you take a good look at yourself and it makes you set goals that are realistic and then the key component to that is to hold you accountable for it." Administrators recognized the importance of comprehending the intent of the school improvement mandates in order for teachers to move towards implementation so they helped the teachers to create a framework for understanding.

Responses to Change

While the school improvement mandates seemed to blend well with district initiatives, they did not arrive without some reactions to the changes required in assessment and reporting. The need to move away from past practices was not embraced by everyone. One principal described some teachers' attitudes this way:

> A specific challenge that our district has faced and a building challenge for this building has been some teachers, four or five teachers we have in our building, that have adamantly fought any kind of change. They will not open up and have any kind of – not even close to — an objective view. They want it just the way they've had it for years. They don't want to change it. They don't care if it helps student learning. They lose sight of that because they are so focused on being over burdened and they have all these things they want to cover and they won't let go of them.

A teacher echoed the existence of resistant attitudes but added a bit of advice, "What's hindered it are the few naysayers who absolutely do not want to change their style and their scheduling and will not be flexible and are so vocal that in

trying to work with people sometimes we've come to a few stops before we can move on and just say 'You can drag your feet, but we are going to go on.'"

Thus, administrators needed to "provide the motivation for them to change" and find ways to help them begin to understand the reason and possible needs for the school improvement mandates. One principal shared this perspective: "It was very difficult for teachers because it was that whole change thing. I think that is one of the schools, that's one of the things that schools and organizations need to do is to give teachers time to come to that on their own, after much discussion and reading recent research." This perspective was held not only by administrators, but by some teachers as well. One suggestion was to not leave the mandates as optional actions for teachers, but to continually expose teachers to the mandates. "You can't force people to do things they don't want to do, but you can expose them to it and open them to ideas and more people will come on board as opposed to if you just left it as an optional thing."

The attitude shown by one of the teachers interviewed captured how many of the teachers in the district felt about the mandates by "learning how to be flexible and go with it. Take lemons and make lemonade out of them. Take the situation as it is and say, 'We're going to make a good situation out of this,' not

always looking for the negative. And it's real hard to move forward when there are a number of people that are being strongly, negatively vocal, but we are moving forward."

Another way the district dealt with attitudes about change, according to one teacher, was to take a "very deliberate job of bringing us along." Teachers were included in a variety of ongoing committees that met by grade level, by building, and across the district. These opportunities provided the teachers and administrators a change to talk, question, share, and discuss what needed to be done in the district. "I've already mentioned having it done district wide so that if you run into troubles or snags, you can, I mean, you can talk to anybody and they know what you are talking about," was how one teacher described the advantage of committees. Another advantage to the varied committees was explained by a teacher this way: "Getting it district wide, so it is not just a few people, but it is everyone having the support, emotionally, physically support. Given an environment where you realize you're growing, you don't have to just arrive. You grow to a point and you keep growing."

Time

Time was another issue that was identified as a consideration for the district in implementing the changes required by the mandates. Several teachers shared that one of the things that was "difficult with these changes is that more expectations are added on to teachers, but the time is not lengthened." One of the principals concurred and shared that "time is *extremely* important. Time for teachers to learn. And I think that district have to make a commitment to that. For teachers to be learners."

The opportunity for the teachers to grow into what the mandates were going to be rather than having the district saying "Here it is. Do it now" was important. There was a timeline, but it was flexible enough for individual teachers to react and practice with new ideas as they felt comfortable. This responsiveness was described by one teacher, "We've had the time to hear things. I mean we had speakers come in and talk to us and stuff. That's been good but they've also given us the time just to kind of talk things through amongst ourselves so to speak. We were given exercises of things to do where it really kept us focused but it made us used to working with other people."

Information Sources

Sharing information was a way that the administration helped teachers to understand the school improvement mandates. The superintendent and curriculum director helped the principals get a handle on the mandates as they "were kind of the scouts going to meetings, trying to make sure we did get an understanding of it and as soon as we developed some confidence in that we held a district wide faculty meeting and presented the information both verbally and in written format."

Information was shared in the written form at the building and district level. Some of the information dealt with the mandates themselves and other information updated the teachers on student achievement. Often that information was shared through "handouts so we can look at it. She (curriculum director) has graphs that are real visual also, you know, so that we can see it and read it and she tells us about it."

Building level meetings and district meetings for the entire staff were also used to share and clarify information. The processing of the information and actual application came in the grade level and content area committees, but the

stage was set by the involvement of the administrators at the various levels. One district level meeting was described by a principal as:

> the way we do it—whole group, I mean all of our staff members, which I think is really good. They see all the administrators up there actively taking part in assessment disaggregation of data. They see us concerned, elated, and know that we are going to be targeting and I think that is very good. It sends a strong message that we are instructional leaders.

Another method of sharing information involved technology. Email was used in the district to share updates and new drafts of the standards, benchmarks, and assessments. This form of communication was also used as a link between the school district and Iowa legislators. Both administrators and teachers communicated with area legislators and members of the education subcommittees. One teacher described the listserve opportunity as "kind of neat." She went on to say, "It lets you know what they've been talking about and that's really neat. You know, you get so busy in your classroom and that other world out there it nice to know what's they're doing that will impact you."

Community

The community was also a part of the communication and information sharing efforts of the district. The main audience for general information was the district advisory committee and parents were the audience for achievement and progress information. The goal was to have a "knowledgeable community" that was supportive of the district's efforts. One teacher stated, "the success of the district depends a lot on whether the community is supportive of what they're doing and is communicated with and they know what is happening. I think that's really key ."

The effort to inform the community had increased in the last few years, as shared by a teacher: "I think we do more of it because their awareness has been heightened and the public knows to ask for things now that they didn't know to ask for or they may not have recognized when they got it. I think now when we always publish scores and stuff in the paper, but I think now when they get it they know what they are reading." The communication with parents had also grown as teachers became better at interpreting data and identifying what should be shared: "I think the focus for the teachers now as far as accountability to the public has increased because their sharing throughout all this process we have

begun sharing more with parents, pre and post testing, the implications of those, the growth, all the benchmarks that we do in reading along the way."

Involvement

The access to and sharing of information did not occur without planning by the administrators and the involvement in various committees by most of the teachers. Committees provided "the big key" in helping teachers, administrators and community members to "take more ownership" in the school improvement process. Teachers on the various committees sometimes represented grade levels, sometimes content areas, and other times their building. The opportunities teachers had to participate gave them "the time to work with, to discuss this with other teachers. (Committee work) is the real key because we get so much out of it. One person will say one thing, it prompts something in someone else, and it just kind of begins to be this big think tank and its just very effective use of time." This teacher went on to add, "But we can come to somewhat of an agreement on it and a consensus in it. Whereas we were doing ourselves I don't think there would be the unity between all the buildings and the district itself." The curriculum director provided the big picture and then the committees fine tuned it for application in the classrooms.

Professional Growth and Development

Involvement in the school improvement process went beyond the teachers involved in committee work. All staff heard about the components of the mandates, district efforts and expectations, committee work, and student achievement data at building and district staff meetings. In addition, meetings often included content information on topics such as student-involved classroom assessment, rubric development, balanced literacy, and instructional strategies for reading. One teacher saw the importance of such meetings: "I think we need to be knowledgeable in the practices and things that are happening in education today, I don't know, to keep current with what's happening."

The district recognized the need to create opportunities over time for teachers to learn and practice new knowledge and skills. They were "expected to learn about theory and philosophy. They were expected to do many, many readings of research and become actively interpreters of research instead of just attending little workshops that show them cute things to do in their room." Teachers also had opportunities to visit other classroom and schools, providing a chance to "and talk with people who have done some of these things and go and watch." The visits with other teachers also helped to create "buy-in" from

teachers who weren't convinced by what they read: "They need to talk to other people in the profession who have actually made those changes and have seen progress and then they'll be more likely to give it a chance at least."

Modeling of strategies, observation of teachers, and feedback conferences were part of the professional growth support that was provided by the principals. One principal described her role as one that would:

> Provide staff with information about why we're doing initiatives. To see some of their input on what we need to do to make improvements in the school and then to provide them training, the new strategies or new ideas or new concepts and then time to implement those. Not just like time in the classroom, but time to plan to organize to create. Ways to check back with them to make certain that they are on the right track and answering any questions they have for follow-up.

Another critical support for professional development was recognized by a teacher who felt it was important that teachers heard information first hand rather than from another teacher. She spoke about a summer conference that she attended at the district's expense. "The whole district what was going to be directly involved went. We didn't just have representatives who came back and

then told us their feelings and what they had heard, but instead, we were all there together learning about it."

Common Understanding

The opportunity to work together and learn together was one way that teachers and administrators were able to begin to understand and make sense of the school improvement mandate. Timing was important in the process. One teacher felt "they brought us to the process at a slow enough rate for us to really process the information, develop our own feelings, and to toss it back and forth." Another teacher shared that administrators took the time to make sure they did understand, "we've been so well supported here and if we don't understand something, they work until we do understand. I like that. I haven't disliked any part of it."

Several administrators cited meetings outside the district and informational materials as being resources that helped them to interpret and make sense out the mandate. One shared this perspective, "To some extent, the technical manuals that came out when we were getting ready to work on those and just conversations with other administrators and what are they doing and how do they interpret this and then the various meetings that different agencies have put on,

the State Department, Area Education Agency 11, those kinds of things." The format in which information was shared was cited as beneficial by another administrator, "Area Education Agency 11 kind of breaks those (mandate components) down and feeds them to you and gives you a chance to not have to look so much at the technical language but more the practical aspect of it and what is it mean to you as a district and how are you going to be able to implement that."

Once the administrators began to understand the mandates and develop ideas about how they might look in the district, they began to share with the teachers. How they shared information was as important to the teachers as it was to the administrators when they first heard it. "I mean our curriculum director has explained to us what we need to know and put it in terms that makes sense so I don't think it's been a real struggle," was how one teacher described the process. The district-wide process was described by another teacher:

> I think it was at the district level, at first, that our superintendent had a meeting with all of us and explained what these mandates really meant and what has been passed and what kind of impact that will have on what we were going to do. So that we understood that when we started having

> inservices about writing the benchmarks and assessments that this wasn't just busy work, that there was a reason behind it and also the reason was not just presented to us as "This is what the legislators say we have to do," but "let's turn this around now take a look at how will this help us as teachers" and I really liked having that part added to it so that it made sense to us.

Internalization and application of the mandate components by the teachers were evident in many of the lessons plans and activities observed in the classrooms. The district learning goals and content standards were posted in the hallways, classrooms, and parent information areas. The benchmarks that were the focus of lessons were listed in lesson plans, written on chalkboards, and communicated to students at the beginning of the lesson. Newsletters that were sent home to parents shared benchmark and assessment information as well as activities that parents could do at home to help strengthen student achievement.

Support

The ongoing process of developing an understanding and making sense of the school improvement mandates was supported in a variety of ways by School District B. The district provided materials that reinforced current practices

and supported teachers as they the connections of these practices to new ideas. One teacher shared that having "the materials available like having this book" was helpful. She went on to say,

> There's been other materials that have been given to us. If she sees something, our curriculum director, that pertains to our field, she will make sure we get a copy of it. And that's been real helpful, too, because there may be areas that kind of reinforces what we are already doing a lot of times, but still that's good too. I think we need to have that assurance that this is right and not just our own idea.

In addition to materials, the district also supported training opportunities and pilot programs that helped teachers focus their improvement efforts on district goals. One teacher explained, "if you show interest in something and you think, this is really good, we've even been encouraged to do some pilot programs on some stuff for and materials have been provided for us." Another teacher described the support she received for a class she was taking with the comment, "They will support and pay for things that are tied to district goals. We can still get leave time to go to other classes and things that we see beneficial but we pay for those

on our own so but if it is something directly tied to the district goals, then the district has funds to pay for those."

Open communication and input were other forms of support that teachers shared. "If I have a question I feel like I can go in and ask. I think that the principal does a good job of keeping us informed with both written material and then if we have a question she will help us out in that area, too. I really feel I can call down to the office and you know I think anybody is open enough to help in that area," was how one teacher described this support. Another teacher talked about the importance of providing background information on initiatives and then how important it was for teachers to have their input included, "I guess the main thing is to provide – I think I am on the right track with this – to provide your staff with information about why we're doing initiatives; to see some of their input on what we need to do to make improvements in the school and then to provide them training on the new strategies or new ideas or new concepts." This teacher went on to explain that besides input, time, in a variety of formats, and follow-up were also critical, "and then time to implement those. Not just like time in the classroom, but time to plan to organize to create. Ways to check back with them

to make certain that they are on the right track and answering any questions they have for follow-up."

One area in need of support that was crucial from the perspective of an administrator was the area of new employees. Hiring teachers that would be a good fit for the district was important, but more important for districts involved in school improvement was what happed after they were hired. The multidimensional support system in the district was described by the administrator :

> I think it is really important that districts who have new initiatives that they create a way to make a continuation of that. So in other words, when you have new staff come on board there is a built in process of indoctrinating or educating or inservicing the new folks into the critical initiatives that your district are into at that particular time. And then, a continual mentoring follow-up cycle that goes with those so that not only for new teachers but for teachers who have recently learned the strategies, even if they are veteran teachers—some kind of support for them after initiatives have been started.

Content Standards and Instruction

The development and refinement of content standards and benchmarks are part of the initiatives in the district that involved teachers both before and after the passage of the school improvement mandates. At the district level, creating a continuum of standards and benchmarks that reflected what was important to community members was how they modified the previously developed outcomes to meet mandate requirements. The superintendent described the process as one where they were "trying to look at the continuum and trying to make sure that we are working towards those things that our community members feel are the most important for students to know and taking a look at a variety of way to assess those and looking at a variety of strategies to use will all students and all learners so we can impact as many different learning styles as possible."

Teachers involved in the initiative approached it from a more practical perspective. One teacher described how she made the transition from a district continuum of standards and benchmarks to a tool to guide instructional planning:

> We tried to make it as useable as possible. And then with those outcomes I put it into my lesson plans. I have my lesson plans on computer and then

> I have all the outcomes that we're supposed to do and all the areas or I should say benchmarks, and then I also have the areas of concentration and then every lesson I look up and see, okay which ones are we covering and I'll underline the ones that I'm using and then it kind of gives me when I notice that I haven't been doing some things for a while, I can say "oh, I better hit this one." Every day I go back and check off what I actually accomplished because sometimes we don't get through everything that I intended to get through so that way I can keep up to see what have I currently been working on and then I can see if there is an area that I have been missing again.

Another teacher described the impact on her teaching as "really teaching the things that are important and are going to be in the long run what the kids need as they go through life."

Alignment & Focus

The standards and benchmarks also began to focus teaching in the district "because not only are they showing us the target that we need to hit, and we're helping to set those, but helping us to learn how to teach them better and how to get to those targets better." One teacher shared how the standards and

benchmarks not only impacted her teaching, but also her monitoring of student progress on a regular basis.

> Some of the key elements are that you are going to individually check children's progress and then you are not going to teach to a whole class a curriculum. You are going to teach to the student's educational level and their needs and then now it impacts the classroom in it does add to the bookkeeping and a teacher has to think carefully and talk with co-workers who are getting it to work so that they can organize their time and use their time to do the things that they need to take care of and make sure they are meeting the students needs and be accountable for keeping track of the levels the students are performing on.

Both teachers and administrators commented that the school improvement mandate requirement for standards and benchmarks has really changed the way people think about what they are teaching. An administrator explained, "I think just the fact that people are talking about, looking at, and focusing on how students learn and what we can do to assist student to learn. I think it's probably been the greatest thing that has pushed the district forward." While a teacher stated that

> curriculum is more focused, purposeful and I think a lot of people are doing a lot of the same things they already did before but it has more of a edge on it. I think knowing the importance of it is kind of neat, too. I mean just knowing this stuff is good. We're doing a good job. I think it's more rewarding that way. So I think in the building I think there is more of a sense of purpose cause we see where we're going.

A principal shared this perspective on classroom instruction, accountability, and the refinement of standards and benchmarks:

> I think one other thing that effects both the individual and the organization is a real emphasis on teaching strategies. It's one thing to set a goal to improve reading or math in a particular grade level. It's quite another thing to know just exactly how to do it. Because we've always wanted to do that but now to say we really have accountability to go in there and do it.

Clear communication and the alignment between the building level and district level goals are two other areas that were assisted by the standards and benchmarks. A teacher explained that "I guess we've always had building and district goals but this just really makes it concrete and puts it out there for the public to see and so everybody's on the same page and we know what we're

shooting for. I think it makes a clear communication for everybody." A broader perspective was explained by a principal who said:

> Okay, at the school level, I think it is going to cause buildings to develop goals that directly lead to the district goals. I think it's just going to make an alignment of the whole goal setting process. I think at the building level it will also cause you to have goals that are not -- well, I hope they are attainable, but you can document, you know, materials to show you are achieving those goals. There will be more student directed goals that we can use assessment measures to show that we meeting them.

Accountability

Multiple measures of assessment were important features of the district's work to align instruction and standards and benchmarks at the classroom level. A principal explained that "at the classroom level our hope is that the teacher will start developing their assessment that will directly tie into our district assessments which are tests that are written for what they've done for the whole year. So I think it will cause a great alignment within the school district." Alignment in the classroom was not necessarily a new approach, but it did move more to the forefront with the mandates. One teacher shared, "I think it was very

easy in the past because there was no clear-cut way of holding teachers accountable for what they were teaching. It was very easy to continue doing what you have always done and not really give it a second thought." She went on to share:

> I think knowing that I am accountable for those benchmarks and those outcomes that we have come up with and I have to keep that always in mind. Not that day to day I do one of those and yet I kind of lead to that I guess. I mean I may have to stair step or spiral a little bit but I guess that leads me in to what I do and teach. I just have a copy of it and I kind of refer to it now and then if I remember. It's what I am responsible for.

The impact of the multiple assessment measures not only included the feeling of accountability for teachers, but it also did create some frustrations making time for the assessment within the teaching day. "Just having the time to assess children, assessment that is meaningful, is very difficult to do in your regular day and still teach everything you need to do. And yet it is extremely important," is how one teacher described how she balanced this perspective.

Class Size

Another source of accountability was the class size mandate. It required

the development and use of diagnostic assessments in reading, but it also provided some support to the districts financially. This support was explained by a principal:

> Financially, that's obviously one of the key components – setting class size targets – trying to work towards that. But I think also what is important in that is that those funds can be used improvement particularly in the basic skills areas with reading being emphasized and so I think your reading assessments and communicating the results of those assessments to parents are also very key elements within that.

The support was viewed in a different way by the teachers. They saw the passage of this mandate as an indication that the legislators were listening to teachers and parents. One teacher stated, "I mean they just couldn't have done anything better for us really." She and the other teachers felt "their voices had finally been heard about class size."

State Policy Makers

The district was on the way to implementing many of the components of the school improvement mandates when they were passed, but that did not stop feelings of frustration with how the components were defined, communicated, or

imposed by the Iowa Department of Education or Iowa legislators. One area shared by district administrators as a source of frustration was the need for a "bit more leadership at the state department level." The need for leadership was defined by one administrator with this example

> I just think we need more leadership from up there and I think, you know, when the revisions came out last September it was like, "Gosh, we worked our tails off to get that first comprehensive school improvement plan and we sent in our first annual progress report. We're feeling really, really good about what we've done." And they're coming back to us and saying, "But that's not enough." You know the teachers are going, "When is enough, enough?" So I just think they need to look at the State level and say, "Are you providing the leadership?"

Another administrator explained that the ongoing changes in what was expected contributed to the frustration, "I just think that they've got to come firm on what they want and not change the rules." Still another administrator shared,

> I think there would be a lot less anxiety and anger if they had worked through all of the details at the beginning. I think the perception from the local district level is – we kind of created this as we went. We get caught

> up trying to accomplish certain requirements and before we get that done we find out that isn't quite what we need to do. It's different or it's something else. That adds a lot to the frustration!

A suggestion made by one administrator illustrates what many of the administrators and teachers felt was a way the Department of Education could have been effective and supportive to school districts:

> I think they need to give individual, just like we need to give individual children support, I think we need to give individual districts support. Somebody that really cares about how your district is going to do. They have some ownership in it. I think those are the two big things. I just think we need clarification and stop changing the rules and then I think we need to support.

Suggestions for Iowa legislators were also shared by teachers and administrators. Paperwork was one of the items identified for consideration. One teacher acknowledged the need for it, but wondered about a more effective way to go about it:

> I think we also need to look at minimizing paperwork because we are here to teach kids and it seems like the more and more constraints that are put

> on us, the less time we have to actually spend with kids and the more time we are spending on paperwork so if we can keep the paperwork park of it to minimum and still get the information out that would be key.

Another teacher, who commented one of her former students was now a legislator, wondered what really happened to all the paperwork that was generated with the mandates asked, "I realize they want accountability, but they must realize the volume of paperwork their requiring and is **somebody** up there at the top really reading it?"

First hand experience in what goes on in the schools was another suggestion made by teachers and administrators. One way to achieve this is to visit classrooms. According to one teacher,

> I would suggest to them that they visit some schools because sometimes I think they get far away. You know they are all in meetings and they get kind of far away from what's reality and what it really looks like in practice. So my advice to them would be come out and see – you know, come to the rural schools, go to the urban schools, go see what it is, what does it look like, what are people doing, what is happening...

An administrator shared the same perspective and also related it to local policy makers, the school board:

> But I just think we need more support from up at the top. I think some of those guys – one thing I will say, I think some those guys that have studied policy, they need to take a day off and come out and visit some schools. I mean it is the same thing we say to the school board. We have a school board that thinks once a month they are going to tell us what to do and they never come out and see us.

Another way to achieve first hand experience would be to involve teachers in the process of developing mandates or to at least talk to teachers. Dialogue with teachers and administrators could help evaluate the possible components or consequences of a mandate before passage. It would also reflect current practices in the classroom instead of "remembered teaching" from a legislator's school experience. One teacher advocated:

> I think it might be good for them to dialogue with some teachers who are on the field before they put out the mandate to say "How would this work?" And they might get some ideas that would help make the terminology

easier or maybe even carry it further than what they already have as far as guidelines and what not. So I think maybe having some teacher input in the process of coming up with the mandate I think would be real good.

One final recommendation to legislators in the area of communication came from a teacher who suggested, "The other thing I think it would be nice to hear the positive – not just what needs to be improved, but what we're doing well, because I think in Iowa there are a lot of things we do really well."

Many components of the school improvement mandate were already in place or in progress in the district. However, the mandate did serve a purpose according to both teachers and administrators. "It makes you take a good look at yourself and it makes you set goals that are realistic and then the key component to that is to hold you accountable for it," is how one administrator explained it. This perspective was also shared by a teacher who stated, "It is added paperwork, but that it has a purpose and an impact for students and for parents as well as for teachers, that is truly it if it's used the right way. It truly will improve our teaching and the kids' learning." Whether school improvement in this district is a result of the outcomes and assessment that were already developed or a result of their implementation of the mandate components, it is obvious that student learning is a

priority and accountability is a way of life. See Figure 2 for a display of the key elements, patterns and themes discovered through the interview process.

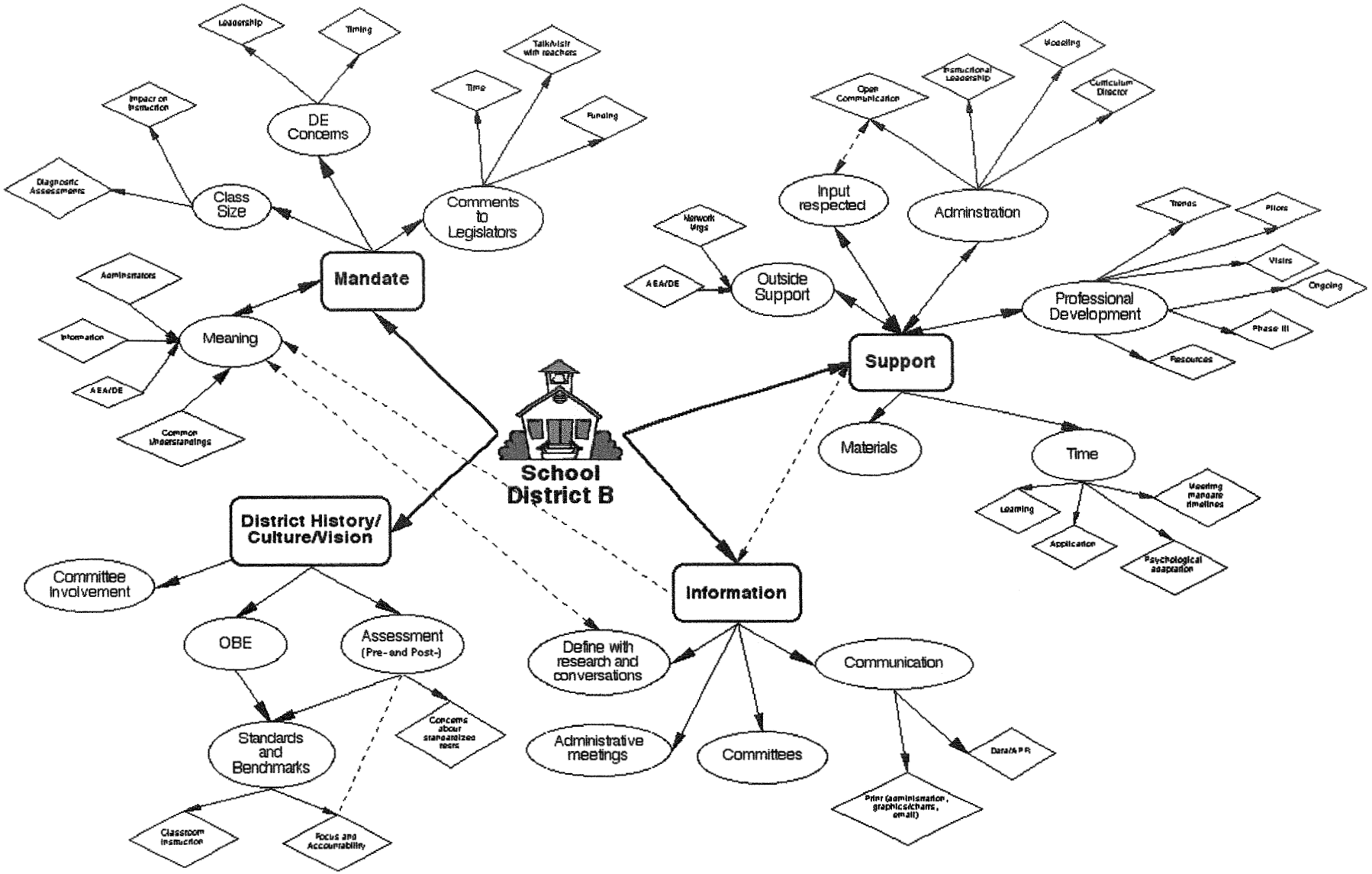

Figure 2. Key elements, patterns and themes from interviews with staff from School District

Discussion

Educational policy is intended to convey information and intentions to teachers and administrators; however, the policies themselves seldom address or pay much attention to what teachers or administrators actually have to learn, what capacities they need to develop, or what behaviors and activities need to be carried out to be consistent with the policy (Elmore, 2000). These capacities and behaviors are part of the variables that influence the local response to educational policies. How districts respond is influenced by local culture, expectations, contextual issues, and leadership structures that support and encourage the engagement of staff in the change process (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988).

Creating cultures that support educational change requires the development of collaborative working relationships between administrators and teachers and among teachers themselves. The collaborative working relationships create a culture where learning communities are guided by trust, risk-taking, openness, information sharing, open communication, and a commitment to continuous improvement (Hargreaves, 1997; Moffett, 2000; Brown & Moffett, 1999).

In addition to a collaborative culture, sustaining school reform at the school or district level requires leadership and an infrastructure that aligns policies and practices with the reform efforts and establishes a two-way information flow within a communication network. Shared decision-making is implicit and all staff have access to knowledge bases that support efforts and help to expand capacity for teaching and learning (Moffett, 2000).

Implementation Functions and Processes

Firestone (1989) identified a number of functions that need to be performed and processes that need to be in place for successful implementation of school improvement mandates. These functions and processes were consistent with the findings identified from the interviews in this study:

Providing and Selling a Vision

The first function identified was "providing and selling a vision." School districts A and B both had a history of leadership that provided and communicated a focused vision to the staff in the district. The school improvement mandates were linked to this vision and teachers were assisted in understanding the purpose of the mandates and how they would impact the day-to-day job of the teachers.

Obtaining Resources

The second function defined by Firestone, "obtaining resources," was described by the central Iowa teachers as opportunities to access information, materials, and training as needed; time provided to learn, talk, and practice; and assistance from outside agencies/networks and internal staff that provided modeling, coaching, and feedback opportunities. Hargreaves (1997) also cited a supportive learning environment as critical to the development of a collaborative culture that encouraged successful change efforts.

Providing Encouragement and Recognition

"Providing encouragement and recognition" was the third function identified by Firestone. Both social and affective support and encouragement were important to the teachers and administrators interviewed in this study. Broad-based involvement of staff was accomplished because staff felt the ideas, questions, and concerns they shared were respected and valued.

Adapting Standard Operating Procedures

A fourth function, "adapting standard operating procedures," appeared in this study in the form of the infrastructures (committees and study teams) that existed in the two school districts as a result of previous initiatives and change

efforts. Business as usual continued with the school improvement mandates simply becoming the new content. Huberman and Miles (1984) explain that educational innovations are not introduced in a vacuum; rather, they are incorporated into existing relationships, attitudes, and historical school context.

Monitoring the Reform Effort

The fifth function, "monitoring the reform effort" and the final function, "handling disturbances," were addressed more in the analysis of documents than in the interviews. Actions were outlined in the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan developed by both school districts to evaluate the planned actions and the ongoing implementation efforts. Possible changes in the action plans resulting from internal or external change forces would be addressed in future Annual Progress Reports submitted to the state department of education.

Common Themes

While the efforts of School District A and School District B to implement the school improvement mandates were different, six common themes emerged from the interviews with administrators and teachers and the classroom observations. The common themes included: (1) district culture and structures, (2) characteristics of information provided and received, (3) support provided to staff and the broad-

based involvement of staff, (4) the impact at the classroom level, (5) the multiple dimensions of time, and (6) suggestions for legislators/policy makers. See Figure 3 for a display of where these themes fit within the individual district diagrams.

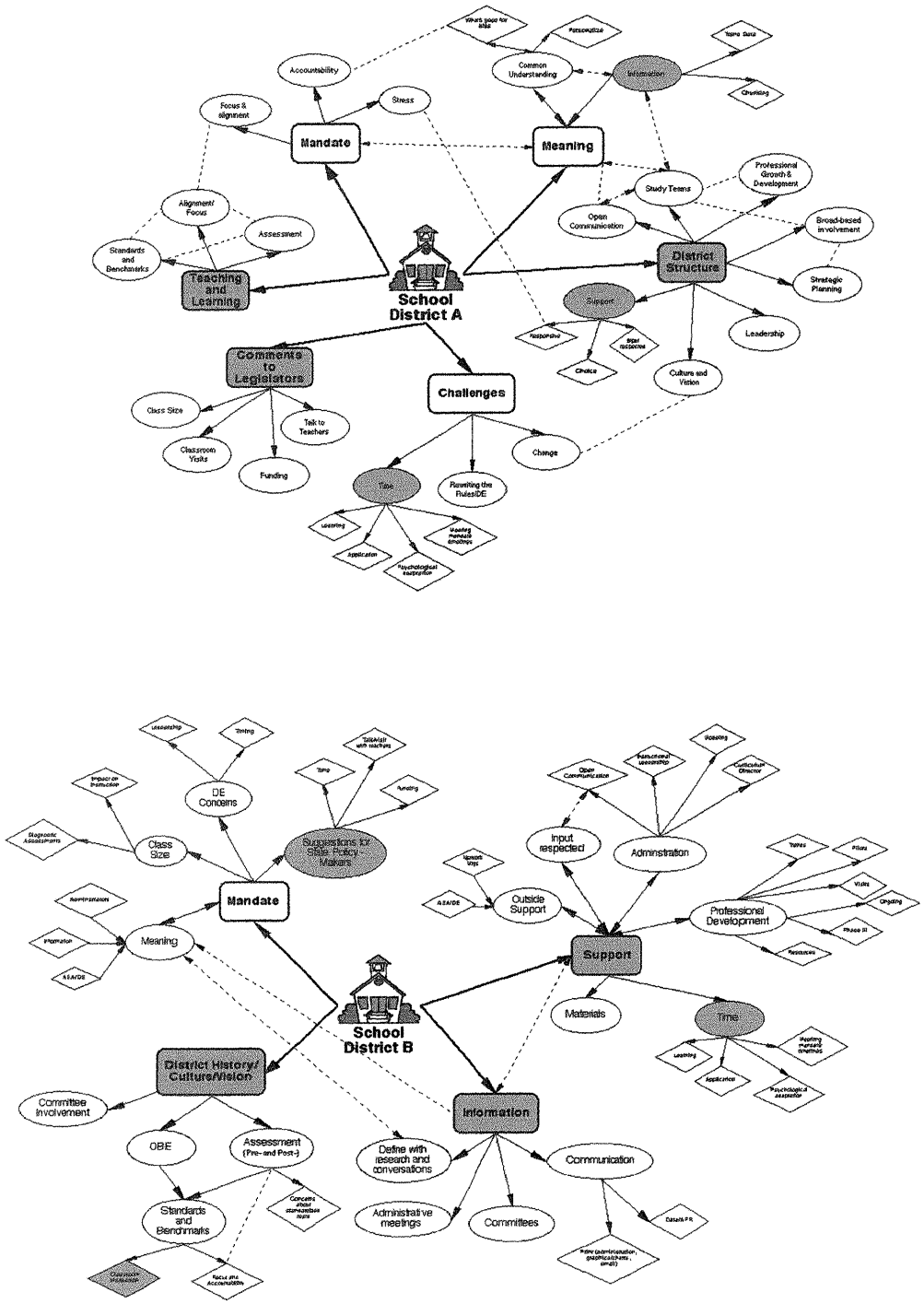

Figure 3. Common themes found within the individual district diagrams.

Both districts have a history of successfully engaging in initiatives that helped to set the stage for a number of the required components of the school improvement mandates with School District A involved in extensive strategic planning and School District B developing outcome-based objectives with pre- and post-test assessments. These previous initiatives established a culture that was supportive of staff involved in change and put children at the center of decision-making. A number of structures, guidance from the curriculum director, study teams, and a variety of committee formats, were created in the district to involve staff and to facilitate communication and the flow of information. These structures became the norm for engaging in district-wide initiatives, thus allowing the new mandate requirements to be easily introduced in a business as usual manner.

The improvement initiatives were also supported by a vision that was communicated by past and current superintendents to the staff with the assistance of the curriculum director and principals. Information about mandates, trend data, and research was provided through the lens of this vision and in a format and manner that helped the district assume ownership and customize the

content to their district context. Understanding and meaning became specific to each district and the culture and vision shaped its implementation.

Information, especially about the school improvement mandates, was not provided in totality, but rather in segments over time so staff had opportunities to understand and begin to assimilate the information before the next segment was presented. Attempts were made to personalize the information to the teachers' jobs in the classroom as opposed to providing the verbatim mandate. Teachers knew the role they played in the implementation of the mandate and how it would impact the students and the district. Broad-based ownership was also developed by involving in some way almost every staff member in defining the content standards and benchmarks and developing the multiple assessment measures.

Goal setting and action planning also involved many of the staff through committee work at the grade, building, and district levels. Input and ideas from staff, parents, and community members were sought and the contributions respected. The process assured that all voices were heard in the development of the comprehensive school improvement plan.

The leadership provided by the administrative team and the use of district structures such as the study teams, improvement teams, and committees

created an atmosphere of open communication and support. Staff felt that their questions, input, and feelings were listened to and valued. A number of the staff commented that the involvement, respect, and affective support that they received, especially in the early stages of the school improvement initiatives helped them to move forward and become involved in the implementation of the content standards, benchmarks, and assessments.

By keeping the focus of the school improvement initiatives on the student, teachers commented that they could see how it could impact their teaching in the classroom. The content standards and benchmarks provided a way to align the curriculum to what they were actually teaching, and in some cases, allowed teachers to actually eliminate content that wasn't part of the grade level content standards and benchmarks. The targets students had to hit in each grade level became clearer and teaching more focused.

Teachers were not in total agreement over the role that assessment should play in the students' lives. Standardized tests were discussed with caution, but a majority of teachers were happy about the inclusion of multiple measures in the assessment plan. There was a concern that some things a student learns could not adequately be represented by a standardized test score.

The opportunity to use various kinds assessments in the classroom to show growth over time was much more positively received. Teachers commented numerous times that documenting growth and development over time was more important than a score on a state report. The diagnostic assessments required by House File 743, while time consuming, demonstrated to the teachers the beginning of policy makers to understand this concept.

Time, always an issue in change and implementation initiatives, was discussed by both teachers and administrators in both districts. The definition of time, however, took on new definitions and dimensions. It was more than just a matter of 24 hours in a day, seven days a week. The issue of time was described in several different contexts in relation to how teachers and administrators needed to deal with the mandates. Time was needed to learn about the mandates and their required components. In addition, opportunities spread over a period of time were needed to begin to understand and define the required components and their possible impact on teaching, learning, existing district activities, and the general business of the district as teachers and administrators moved toward application and implementation at the local level.

Implementing the school improvement mandate components meant change for a number of individuals. This meant time for staff to adjust and deal with psychological adaptations was needed. Even for those teachers and administrators who were totally in favor of the mandate requirements, change did not happen overnight. Finally, there was a concern voiced about the timetable for implementing the mandates. The timeframe from passage of the mandates into law to required implementation in the district seemed too short for effective implementation in districts. While School Districts A and B had many structures in place to assist them, and in fact had some components at or near implementation, a number of teachers and administrators worried about other districts who weren't as prepared. It was suggested that quality of implementation and the time to really think through consequences might have been more important than getting an law on the books. Continuity was important within the district and across the state.

As with any mandate imposed from the outside, suggestions for legislators to improve the current and future mandates were shared. Many of the teachers and administrators shared the opinion that accountability was needed and was

an important factor in today's mobile society. They did, however, have several suggestions for the process of creating and implementing the mandates.

A critical suggestion was for legislators to seek out first hand information from educators. Spending time in classrooms was one way they felt legislators could get a real sense for the complexity if their jobs and how mandates might affect the day-to-day job of a teacher or administrator. Meaningful dialogue and discussion were two additional methods that could be used to hear about what was important and truly needed from the perspective of those who live the educational process every day. Teachers were not opposed to new ideas but felt that they might be able to offer suggestions regarding more practical and realistic implementation.

Another suggested area for consideration was time. As discussed previously, the issue of time is more complex than simply adding a day or two to the school year. The teachers and administrators felt that legislators needed to have a better understanding of what was involved in the implementation of this or future mandates. Immediate implementation was not as important to them as doing the job well and in a thoughtful manner.

Finally, the teachers cautioned legislators to consider the growth and development of the students over time. There was a concern that judgements and high-stakes decisions about students, teachers, schools, or district would be made from standardized test scores and would not take into consideration the big picture of the educational process. While standardized test scores are one measure of educational progress, multiple factors contribute to a child's education and development and it is critical to consider multiple forms of data for decision-making. A concern was also shared that the over reliance on the use of standardized tests could adversely affect the curriculum taught and the time teachers needed to teach.

The implementation of the school improvement mandates at the district and classroom level has not been an easy nor linear process. School Districts A and B had to define the meaning of the components for themselves. Successful implementation meant involving a large number of staff members in a process that highlighted existing school improvement initiatives, explored the new requirements, considered what was best for students, and then blended these components into a new system that met the mandate requirements but was a good fit at the local level. Ownership at the local level allowed application and

implementation at the classroom level, the level at which the students would most be impacted.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

Iowa, like the other states across the country, has engaged in efforts to increase student achievement through the passage of school improvement mandates. This study was an effort to describe these efforts from the perspective of two central Iowa school districts.

The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze factors that assist in the creation of meaning at the local level of the Iowa school improvement mandates and determine what assisted implementation of the mandates at the classroom level. Additionally, considerations and suggestions for policy-makers were developed to guide the development of future mandates.

Three research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What is the history and intent of the Iowa comprehensive school improvement mandates?
2. How do the state school improvement mandates translate into district/building policy and classroom practice?

3. What recommendations can be made to policymakers and administrators regarding the effective implementation of state school improvement mandates?

Conclusions

The intent of the Iowa comprehensive school improvement mandates, described in detail with the history in Chapter 2, was to define a dynamic process aimed at advancing student learning for all students in the state. This process encouraged school districts to pursue learning goals developed within their own communities and to set local standards (Iowa Department of Education, 1999). Local design-making was a cornerstone in the process to consolidate planning efforts to increase student achievement.

The following five conclusions were drawn from this study:

1. Leading school reform is everybody's business. Policy-makers can help by involving the citizens in the process. The role of stating and supporting a state vision of education belongs to the legislators and state policy-makers but implementation happens at the local level so acceptance and buy-in from citizens is critical to successful implementation. Making connections to current initiatives/efforts and keeping students as the central focus of discussions and

policy development helps citizens to feel they have a voice and are and integral part of new school reform efforts. If new policy is a good idea for schools in Iowa, legislators and state policy-makers should themselves be able to sell the idea and why it is important to the citizens of the state.

2. Good policy design is worth the effort. While the need for improvement and accountability was recognized by the teachers and administrators, they felt that the timeline for implementation and the changing of rules and expectations during the process created a frustrating, confusing, and stressful situation at the local level. Good policy design means taking the time to ensure that thought is given to intended consequences, current practices and research, possible interactions with existing state and federal policy, and the time, knowledge, skill, and attitudes needed at the local level for successful implementation. Good politics or the desire to be the first in the country to pass a policy does not necessarily equal good policy at a local level.

3. Design policy to reflect the complexity of implementation reality. When policy is implemented at the local level, variability in priorities, needs, goals, capacity, and will is inevitable. Thus, policy needs to be flexible while providing guidance and direction. Local culture, leadership, and support structures

influence the understanding and ownership of a policy so clarity on the absolutes of a policy and the areas of choice and flexibility are critical.

4. Time matters. To really impact what happens at the classroom level, the multiple dimensions of time need to be considered and planned for in the development of a policy mandate. Teachers and administrators need time to become aware of the mandate and its required components. Time to develop a deep understanding of the mandate and to create personal, mental models is also needed. Implementation of the mandate involves time to practice, to reflect, to modify, and to assess actions and efforts.

5. Rewriting the rules is not cool! Many individual and group efforts go into the implementation of policy a the local level. Efficiency, effectiveness, and ownership can be threatened when the rules for implementation change during the process. Districts become leery of moving forward with new policy when the result means having to undo, redo, and create new because rules change midstream. States do not always have control over changes that result from federal policy change; however, taking time in the beginning to consider all options would be well worth the effort when balanced against the stress, frustration, and willingness to move beyond compliance at the local level.

Implications

The teachers and administrators interviewed for this study acknowledged the need for increasing student achievement and for an increase in the accountability of school district to parents and community members. This recognition and the implementation of the required components of the Iowa school improvement mandates occurred in both school districts although the routes they took to get there were different, influenced by the history, culture, and leadership of the district.

Four implications were drawn from this study:

1. While policy mandates tend to be linear in character, they are implemented at a local level where systems are often more fluid and reflect local goals and capacities. Local context and priorities often have more influence on the improvement efforts in a district than the mandate that is written on paper. Districts have an easier time meeting the needs of their communities if opportunities for flexibility are included in a policy mandate. Rigid expectations can create chaos when introduced into a local control setting where districts are active in school improvement efforts.

2. It is important in the creation of new policy mandates to consider established structures in a district that support ongoing learning for staff and two-way communication opportunities that encourage involvement of staff in school improvement efforts. If processes and procedures are familiar, it is easier and less stressful to concentrate on the new knowledge and skills needed. In addition, providing social, affective, and resource-oriented support creates an environment that encourages risk-taking and a willingness to engage in the process.

3. Information from and about a policy mandate is better understood by teachers when it is provided in a selective manner. Providing the information in increments with explanations of how it relates to what a teacher does in the classroom and why it is important creates opportunities for teachers to begin to understand and personalize the information so that it has meaning for them. Because teachers have different learning styles, it is also important the information is provided in a variety of formats and that multiple opportunities are provided to discuss and question the content and meaning.

4. District leadership plays an important role in setting the stage for school improvement efforts. A clear purpose, focus, and vision needs to be

communicated to all staff. This begins the translation of a policy mandate into language that fits the context and culture of the local district. Making connections to past and current district initiatives, practices, and policies also helps to establish efforts as part of the normal routine.

Recommendations

The identification of what happens in a school district when a school improvement mandate is implemented allows educators, legislators, and outside agencies to examine current and future efforts that could support districts in implementation. Based on my findings and others' research, reflection, and study, I would make the following recommendations:

State Legislators and Other Policy-makers

1. Bring educators into the process when decisions about design, funding, and implementation strategies are being discussed because these are the issues that most concern them.

2. Consider the processes, strategies, and timelines needed for successful implementation because effective change does not occur overnight nor in an atmosphere of frequent modification of the rules.

Local Policy-makers and Administrators

3. When and where possible, link components of mandates to existing efforts in the district and/or previous improvement efforts to reduce fragmentation and overload.

4. Establish and support structures in the district to encourage professional learning, risk-taking, and open communication.

Future Research Studies

5. Replicate this study at the secondary level.

6. Now that the Iowa school improvement mandates have had time to be implemented, a study should be conducted to examine the impact on student achievement.

7. A broader study which would investigate how the subsequent education mandates in Iowa are being connected to the school improvement mandates would enable educators to identify ongoing implementation patterns.

Because what matters cannot be mandated, school districts need to move away from district cultures that support compliance and move towards cultures that focus school improvement efforts on structures that foster cooperation, teamwork, mutual respect, meaningful engagement of all staff, and collaborative

decision-making. Then when districts are faced with new mandates or reform efforts, a culture exists that encourages staff to participate in efforts to resolve the cognitive dissonance between their beliefs and the mandates or reform requirements. It will provide opportunities to view the efforts both as a challenge and as an opportunity to learn and create change.

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APPENDIXES

A. Site Selection Letter

B. Human Subjects Consent to Participate Form

C. Timeline for School Improvement Mandates

D. Interview Protocol and Questions

E. House File 2272

F. House File 743

Kimberly Thuente
8710 Alpine Drive
Urbandale, IA 50322
515-270-1051

December 13, 1999

Dear XXXX,

My dissertation topic and questions have been accepted by my Drake University committee chair and I am ready to being writing my formal proposal. My dissertation will be a policy implementation study focusing on Iowa HF 2272/Revised Chapter 12 as experienced by three schools in the Heartland AEA 11 area. My questions at this point include:

- What factors are present or are in development in districts that promote or encourage the active use of a state mandate (HF 2272)?
- Through active use, how does the state mandate translate into district/building policy and classroom practice?

(Active use is defined by Fuhrman, Clune, & Elmore in an article by William Firestone as "acting in advance" of the mandate or "responding in a manner that exceeds the minimum.")

My study sample will involve two mid-sized districts located within the AEA 11 service area. Mid-size has been defined as having a certified enrollment for 1998–99 of 500 to 2500 students. Two districts that fall within this range, Perry and Waukee, have been eliminated from the sample pool to avoid possible conflict of interest as I serve as the Heartland school improvement primary partner for them.

Five individuals are being asked to indicate 3–5 districts from the attached list that they feel are involved at the active use level, are currently moving forward with the components of HF 2272, or in the past have exhibited active use of other mandates or innovations. From the responses, I will look for commonalties of suggested districts to narrow the field down to three. I am seeking your assistance in identifying the districts that will potentially be involved in my study. Please look over the enclosed list and mark 3-5 districts you think fit the stated characteristics and return the list to me in the enclosed envelope.

I would be happy to answer any questions you have about this process or the study and can be reached at the above listed home telephone number or at my work number (515–270–0405, ext. 4372). Thank you for your assistance!

Sincerely yours,

Kimberly Thuente

School Improvement Mandates in Iowa

1998	1999	1999	2000
House File 2272	House File 743	Chapter 12 Revisions of the Iowa Administrative Code	Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) and Annual Progress Report (APR) are due at the Iowa Department of Education
Accountability for Student Learning	*Early Intervention Program/ Class Size Reduction*	*Technical Assistance for Comprehensive School Improvement Manual*	
Standards and Benchmarks Multiple Assessments Action Planning Community Goal Setting	Diagnostic Assessment–Reading Communicating with Parents Class Size	Manual Checklists	5 year Plan (CSIP) Annual Progress Report (APR)

Interview Protocol

Setting the Stage

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. Your time and responses are appreciated and will make a contribution to this study. I will be scripting notes during the interview, but with your permission I would like to record the interview. Please be aware that I will stop recording at your request.

Assurance of Confidentiality

All interviews will be kept confidential. A typist will transcribe the interviews and I will review the recordings for accuracy and future analysis. Each interview will be labeled with a special code and information gathered from the interviewees will be given fictitious names for the final report.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to answer the question: How do teachers and administrators make meaning of a state school improvement mandate and how do they put that meaning into practice in classrooms?

Interview Questions

Closing

I would like to thank you for your time. May I contact you if I need clarification as I transcribe the interview? _____

Best time and place/number? _____

Again, thank you for your cooperation.

Administrator Interview Questions

What knowledge base and reasoning skills assist in the development of meaning of school improvement mandates?

How do you define the key elements of HF 2272/HF743 (Chapter 12 revisions) at the local school or classroom level?

What kinds of organizational or individual capacities do schools and school personnel need to develop to deliver high-quality teaching & learning in response to the requirement) of HF 2272/HF743 (Chapter 12 revisions)?

How do the state mandates translate into district/building policy and classroom practice?

What has influenced your district's/school's response to HF 2272/HF743 (Chapter 12 revisions)?

How was HF 2272/HF743 (Chapter 12 revisions) communicated to your building?

What evidence can your district/building show to demonstrate your practices and strategies are impacting teaching & learning or student achievement?

What influenced your interpretation of the state school improvement policy?

What external/internal factors impact the implementation of HF 2272/HF743 (Chapter 12 revisions)?

What affects a school's sense of accountability and its ability to deliver good teaching and learning?

What are the challenges/barriers in your district/building to improve student achievement?

What changes occurred over time in (school/community/classroom practices) that might have affected the impact of the state school improvement policy?

Teacher Interview Questions

How do the state school improvement mandates translate into district/building policy and classroom practice?
What knowledge base and reasoning skills assist in the development of meaning of school improvement mandates?

Do you remember the passage of HF 2272 (comprehension school improvement) in 1998 and HF 743 (early intervention/diagnostic assessment) in 1999?
Tell me about your involvement/efforts in district's school improvement journey.

Identify what you think are the key elements of HF 2272/HF743 (Chapter 12 revisions) and how you think they impact the day-to-day operations of the school/classroom?

How was HF 2272/HF743 (Chapter 12 revisions) communicated to your building?

What activities/resources engaged you in learning about the mandated components of the CSIP? Who was involved?

What kinds of organizational or individual capacities do schools and school personnel need to develop to deliver high-quality teaching & learning in response to the demands (requirements) of HF 2272/HF743 (Chapter 12 revisions)?

What external/internal factors impact the implementation of HF 2272/HF743 (Chapter 12 revisions)?
What is the impact of HF 2272/HF743 (Chapter 12 revisions) on your building/district?
What is the impact on teaching and learning and student achievement?

What challenges/barriers have you faced as you have interpreted the legislation and applied it in the building/classroom?

What factors helped or hindered the active use of the mandated components of the CSIP?

What previous experiences have helped to facilitate the implementation of the CSIP?

What intervention(s) and technical assistance have had the most significant impact on the school improvement efforts?

HF 2272

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HOUSE FILE 2272

AN ACT

REQUIRING THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO ADOPT RULES RELATING TO THE INCORPORATION OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT INTO THE EDUCATION STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION PROCESS.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF IOWA:

Section 1. Section 256.7, Code 1997, is amended by adding the following new subsection:

NEW SUBSECTION. 21. Develop and adopt rules by July 1, 1999, incorporating accountability for student achievement into the standards and accreditation process described in section 256.11. The rules shall provide for all of the following:

a. Requirements that all school districts and accredited nonpublic schools develop, implement, and file with the department a comprehensive school improvement plan that includes, but is not limited to, demonstrated school, parental, and community involvement in assessing educational needs, establishing local education standards and student achievement levels, and, as applicable, the consolidation of federal and state planning, goal-setting, and reporting requirements.

b. A set of core academic indicators in mathematics and reading in grades four, eight, and eleven, a set of core academic indicators in science in grades eight and eleven, and another set of core indicators that includes, but is not limited to, graduation rate, postsecondary education, and successful employment in Iowa. Annually, the department shall report state data for each indicator in the condition of education report.

c. A requirement that all school districts and accredited nonpublic schools annually report to the department and the local community the district-wide progress made in attaining student achievement goals on the academic and other core indicators and the district-wide progress made in attaining locally established student learning goals. The school districts and accredited nonpublic schools shall demonstrate the use of multiple assessment measures in determining student

achievement levels. The school districts and accredited nonpublic schools may report on other locally determined factors influencing student achievement. The school districts and accredited nonpublic schools shall also report to the local community their results by individual attendance center.

_____

RON J. CORBETT
Speaker of the House

_____

MARY E. KRAMER
President of the Senate

I hereby certify that this bill originated in the House and is known as House File 2272, Seventy-seventh General Assembly.

_____

ELIZABETH ISAACSON
Chief Clerk of the House

Approved _____, 1998

_____

TERRY E. BRANSTAD
Governor

Signed by Governor Branstad on May 6, 1998.

HF 743

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1 1 HOUSE FILE 743

1 2

1 3 AN ACT

1 4 RELATING TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN IOWA EARLY INTERVENTION
1 5 BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM, PROVIDING FOR A SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
1 6 TECHNOLOGY BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS.

1 7

1 8 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF IOWA:

1 9

1 10 Section 1. NEW SECTION. 256E.1 IOWA EARLY INTERVENTION
1 11 BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM ESTABLISHED – GOALS.
1 12 1. An Iowa early intervention block grant program is
1 13 established within the department of education. The program's
1 14 goals for kindergarten through grade three are to provide the
1 15 resources needed to reduce class sizes in basic skills
1 16 instruction to the state goal of seventeen students for every
1 17 one teacher; provide direction and resources for early
1 18 intervention efforts by school districts to achieve a higher
1 19 level of student success in the basic skills, especially
1 20 reading skills; and increase communication and accountability
1 21 regarding student performance. The Iowa early intervention
1 22 block grant program shall consist of the following:
1 23 a. Class size management. School districts shall develop
1 24 a class size management strategy to work toward, or to
1 25 maintain, class sizes in basic skills instruction for
1 26 kindergarten through grade three that are at the state goal of
1 27 seventeen students for every one teacher.
1 28 b. Improving instruction in the basics. The department of
1 29 education shall identify diagnostic assessment tools that can
1 30 be used to assist teachers in measuring reading accuracy and
1 31 fluency skills, including but not limited to, phonemic
1 32 awareness, oral reading ability, and comprehensive skills, to
1 33 improve student achievement in kindergarten through grade
1 34 three. The department, in collaboration with the area
1 35 education agencies, school districts, and institutions with
2 1 approved practitioner preparation programs, shall identify and
2 2 serve as a clearinghouse on intensive, research-based
2 3 strategies and programs for training teachers in both
2 4 diagnosis and appropriate instruction interventions.
2 5 (1) A school district shall at a minimum biannually inform
2 6 parents of their individual child's performance on the
2 7 diagnostic assessments in kindergarten through grade three.
2 8 If intervention is appropriate, the school district shall
2 9 inform the parents of the actions the school district intends
2 10 to take to improve the child's reading skills and provide the
2 11 parents with strategies to enable the parents to improve their
2 12 child's skills. The board of directors of each school
2 13 district shall adopt a policy indicating the methods the

school district will use to inform parents of their individual child's performance.

(2) The department shall also identify for school districts programs and materials by which parents may support classroom reading instruction.

2. A school district shall integrate its specific early intervention block grant program goals and activities into the comprehensive school improvement plan required under section 256.7, subsection 21, paragraph "a".

3. For purposes of this chapter, unless the context otherwise requires, "parent" means a biological or adoptive parent, a stepparent, or a legal guardian or custodian of a student.

Sec. 2. NEW SECTION. 256E.2 PROGRAM EXPENDITURES.

A school district shall expend funds received pursuant to section 256E.4 at the kindergarten through grade three levels to reduce class sizes to the state goal of seventeen students for every one teacher and to achieve a higher level of student success in the basic skills, especially reading. In order to support these efforts, school districts may expend funds received pursuant to section 256E.4 at the kindergarten through grade three level on programs, instructional support, and materials that include, but are not limited to, the following: additional licensed instructional staff; additional support for students, such as before and after school programs, tutoring, and intensive summer programs; the acquisition and administration of diagnostic reading assessments; the implementation of research-based instructional intervention programs for students needing additional support; the implementation of all-day, everyday kindergarten programs; and the provision of classroom teachers with intensive training programs to improve reading instruction and professional development in best practices, including but not limited to training programs related to instruction to increase students' phonemic awareness, reading abilities, and comprehension skills.

Sec. 3. NEW SECTION. 256E.3 ANNUAL REPORTS.

1. A school district shall report annually to its school community the proportion of fourth grade students who are proficient in reading in accordance with section 256.7, subsection 21, paragraph "c". School districts are encouraged to submit to their communities composite information concerning the reading proficiency of their kindergarten through grade three enrollments, by grade level.

2. The annual report submitted to the department of education in accordance with section 256.7, subsection 21, paragraph "c", shall include the district's current class sizes for kindergarten through grade three.

3. Beginning January 15, 2001, the department shall submit an annual report to the chairpersons and ranking members of the senate and house education committees that includes the statewide average school district class size in basic skills

instruction in kindergarten through grade three, by grade level and by district size, and describes school district progress toward achieving early intervention block grant program goals and the ways in which school districts are using moneys received pursuant to section 256E.4.

Sec. 4. NEW SECTION. 256E.4 PROGRAM ALLOCATION.

1. For each fiscal year in the fiscal period beginning July 1, 1999, and ending June 30, 2001, moneys appropriated pursuant to section 256E.5, subsection 1, paragraph "a" or "b", shall be allocated to school districts in accordance with the following formula:

a. Fifty percent of the allocation shall be based upon the proportion that the kindergarten through grade three enrollment of a district bears to the sum of the kindergarten through grade three enrollments of all school districts in the state as reported for the base year.

b. Fifty percent of the allocation shall be based upon the proportion that the number of children who are eligible for free or reduced price meals under the federal National School Lunch Act and the federal Child Nutrition Act of 1966, 42 U.S.C. } 1751-1785, in grades one through three of a school district bears to the sum of the number of children who are eligible for free or reduced price meals under the federal National School Lunch Act and the federal Child Nutrition Act of 1966, 42 U.S.C. } 1751-1785, in grades one through three in all school districts in the state for the base year.

2. For each fiscal year in the fiscal period beginning July 1, 2001, and ending June 30, 2003, moneys appropriated pursuant to section 256E.5, subsection 1, paragraph "c", shall be allocated to school districts as follows:

a. Allocation of the sum of twenty million dollars shall be based upon the proportion that the kindergarten through grade three enrollment of a district bears to the sum of the kindergarten through grade three enrollments of all school districts in the state as reported for the base year.

b. Allocation of the sum of ten million dollars shall be based upon the proportion that the number of children who are eligible for free or reduced price meals under the federal National School Lunch Act and the federal Child Nutrition Act of 1966, 42 U.S.C. } 1751-1785, in grades one through three of a school district bears to the sum of the number of children who are eligible for free or reduced price meals under the federal National School Lunch Act and the federal Child Nutrition Act of 1966, 42 U.S.C. } 1751-1785, in grades one through three in all school districts in the state for the base year.

3. For each year in which an appropriation is made to the Iowa early intervention block grant program, the department of education shall notify the department of revenue and finance of the amount of the allocation to be paid to each school district as provided in subsections 1 and 2. The allocation to each school district shall be made in one payment on or

about October 15 of the fiscal year for which the appropriation is made, taking into consideration the relative budget and cash position of the state resources. Moneys received under this section shall not be commingled with state aid payments made under section 257.16 to a school district and shall be accounted for by the local school district separately from state aid payments. Payments made to school districts under this section are miscellaneous income for purposes of chapter 257. A school district shall maintain a separate listing within its budget for payments received and expenditures made pursuant to this section. A school district shall certify to the department of education that moneys received under this section were used to supplement, not supplant, moneys otherwise received and used by the school district.

4. For purposes of this section, unless the context otherwise requires, "kindergarten through grade three enrollment" means the enrollment as reported in the basic educational data survey for the base year.

Sec. 5. NEW SECTION. 256E.5 APPROPRIATIONS.

1. There is appropriated from the general fund of the state to the department of education, the following amounts, for the following fiscal years, for the Iowa early intervention block grant program:

a. For the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1999, and ending June 30, 2000, the sum of ten million dollars.

b. For the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2000, and ending June 30, 2001, the sum of twenty million dollars.

c. For each fiscal year of the fiscal period beginning July 1, 2001, and ending June 30, 2003, the sum of thirty million dollars.

2. There is appropriated from the general fund of the state to the department of education for each fiscal year of the fiscal period beginning July 1, 2001, and ending June 30, 2003, the sum of thirty million dollars for the school improvement technology block grant program.

Sec. 6. NEW SECTION. 256E.6 DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TECHNOLOGY BLOCK GRANT FUNDS.

1. From the moneys appropriated in section 256E.5, subsection 2, other than the moneys allocated in subsection 2 of this section, for each fiscal year in which moneys are appropriated, the amount of moneys allocated to school districts shall be in the proportion that the basic enrollment of a district bears to the sum of the basic enrollments of all school districts in the state for the budget year. However, except as provided in subsection 6, a district shall not receive less than ten thousand dollars in a fiscal year. The Iowa braille and sight saving school, the state school for the deaf, and the Price laboratory school at the university of northern Iowa shall annually certify their basic enrollments to the department of education by October 1. The department of human services shall certify the average student yearly

enrollments of the institutions under department of human services control as provided in section 218.1, subsections 1 through 3, 5, 7, and 8, to the department of education by October 1.

2. From the moneys appropriated in section 256E.5, subsection 2, for each fiscal year in which moneys are appropriated, the sum of one hundred fifty thousand dollars shall be divided among the area education agencies based upon each area education agency's percentage of the total full-time equivalent elementary and secondary teachers employed in the school districts in this state. An area education agency may contract with an appropriate accredited institution of higher education in Iowa to provide staff development and training in accordance with section 256E.7.

3. For each year in which an appropriation is made to the school improvement technology block grant program, the department of education shall notify the department of revenue and finance of the amount to be paid to each school district and area education agency based upon the distribution plan set forth for the appropriation made pursuant to this section. The allocation to each school district and area education agency under this section shall be made in one payment on or about October 15 of the fiscal year in which the appropriation is made, taking into consideration the relative budget and cash position of the state resources.

4. Payments made to school districts and area education agencies under this section are miscellaneous income for purposes of chapter 257. Moneys received under this section shall not be commingled with state aid payments made under sections 257.16 and 257.35 to a school district or area education agency and shall be accounted for by the local school district or area education agency separately from state aid payments.

5. Moneys received under this section shall not be used for payment of any collective bargaining agreement or arbitrator's decision negotiated or awarded under chapter 20.

6. For purposes of this section and section 256E.8, "school district" means a school district, the Iowa braille and sight saving school, the state school for the deaf, the Price laboratory school at the university of northern Iowa, and the institutions under the control of the department of human services as provided in section 218.1, subsections 1 through 3, 5, 7, and 8. However, notwithstanding subsection 1, the amount of moneys allocated to the institutions under the control of the department of human services as provided in section 218.1, subsections 1, 2, 3, and 5, shall be a total of not more than twenty thousand dollars for each fiscal year, to be distributed proportionately between the four institutions by the department of education.

Sec. 7. NEW SECTION. 256E.7 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TECHNOLOGY PLANNING.

1. Commencing with the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2001,

each school district shall include a technology plan as a component of the annual report submitted to the department of education in accordance with section 256.7, subsection 21, paragraphs "a" and "c". The plan shall be developed by licensed professional staff of the district, including both teachers and administrators. The plan shall, at a minimum, focus on the attainment of student achievement goals on academic and other core indicators, consider the district's interconnectivity with the Iowa communications network, and demonstrate how the board will utilize technology to improve student achievement. The technology plan shall be kept on file in the district and a copy of the plan, and any subsequent amendments to the plan, shall be sent to the appropriate area education agency.

2. Prior to receiving funds under this chapter, each area education agency shall develop a plan to assist school districts in the development of a technology planning process to meet the purposes of the school improvement technology block grant program. The plan shall describe how the area education agency intends to support school districts with instructional technology staff development and training. The department shall approve each plan prior to the disbursement of funds. An area education agency needs to develop only one plan and send it to the department of education while this chapter is effective. An area education agency may submit a plan that meets the requirements of chapter 295, Code 2001. An annual progress report shall be submitted to the department of education.

3. Prior to receiving funds pursuant to section 256E.5, subsection 2, the Iowa braille and sight saving school, the state school for the deaf, and the Price laboratory school at the university of northern Iowa shall each submit to the state board of regents and the department of education a technology plan that supports and improves student achievement, demonstrates how technology will be utilized to improve student achievement, and includes an evaluation component. The schools listed in this subsection need to develop only one plan each to send to the state board of regents and the department of education while this chapter is effective. An annual progress report shall be submitted to the state board of regents and the department of education.

4. Prior to receiving funds pursuant to section 256E.5, subsection 2, the institutions under the control of the department of human services as provided in section 218.1, subsections 1 through 3, 5, 7, and 8, shall each submit to the departments of education and human services a technology plan that supports and improves student achievement, demonstrates the manner in which technology will be utilized to improve student achievement, and includes an evaluation component. Each institution developing a plan under this subsection needs to develop only one plan to send to the departments of education and human services while this chapter is effective.

Each institution shall submit an annual progress report to the departments of education and human services. Each institution shall submit an annual progress report to the departments of education and human services.

Sec. 8. NEW SECTION. 256E.8 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TECHNOLOGY BLOCK GRANT EXPENDITURES.

1. Except as provided in subsection 2, a school district shall expend funds received pursuant to section 256E.5, subsection 2, for the acquisition, lease, lease-purchase, installation, and maintenance of instructional technology equipment, including hardware and software, materials and supplies related to instructional technology, and staff development and training related to instructional technology, and shall establish priorities for the use of the funds. However, funds received by a school district pursuant to section 256E.5, subsection 2, shall not be expended to add a full-time equivalent position or otherwise increase staffing.

2. A school district may expend up to two-thirds of the funds received annually pursuant to section 256E.5, subsection 2, for any of the purposes described in section 256E.2, including for the employment of additional licensed instructional staff.

3. Funds received by an area education agency pursuant to section 256E.6, subsection 2, shall be expended for the costs related to supporting school districts within the area served with technology planning and equipment, including hardware and software, materials and supplies related to instructional technology, and staff development and training related to instructional technology.

Sec. 9. NEW SECTION. 256E.9 FUTURE REPEAL.

This chapter is repealed effective July 1, 2003.

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RON J. CORBETT
Speaker of the House

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MARY E. KRAMER
President of the Senate

I hereby certify that this bill originated in the House and is known as House File 743, Seventy-eighth General Assembly.

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ELIZABETH ISAACSON
Chief Clerk of the House

Approved _____, 1999

11 11 _____
11 12 THOMAS J. VILSACK
11 13 Governor

Signed by Governor Vilsack on April 13, 1999